BULLSHIT IN AMERICA
JONATHAN LEAR

DEMOCRACY IN THE MIDDLE EAST
ANDREW LEE BUTTERS,
ANNIA CIEZADLO, THE EDITORS

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

BUSH'S SOCIAL SECURITY PLAN

THE REAL REASON THEY WANT TO
N. GREGORY MANKIW

WHY DEMOCRATS MUST BLOCK IT
JONATHAN CHAIT

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CORRESPONDENCE

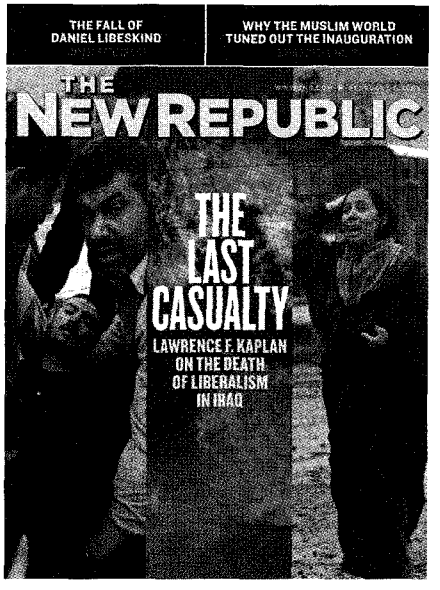
RED-FACED

ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER, I regret to say, will probably not accommodate T.A. Frank by battering me ("Left Out," February 7). There would be no honor in it at any rate; I'm a small man who never laid claim to any particular prowess at pugilism. I never needed it in my military career. For several centuries now, we Army guys have been using guns to impose our will on others. Speaking of history, I might as well reiterate the very statement that set Frank off in the first place: Nothing ever gets accomplished by elections. What he seems to be mad about is that, by implication, Democrats are not the answer to Republicans, which is utterly true as even a cursory glance at history will show. Politicians tail social movements, they don't lead them. We disrupt shit; then they get nervous and codify change.

STAN GOFF
Raleigh, North Carolina

I ATTENDED THE RALLY DESCRIBED IN "Left Out," and I am extremely offended by the cynicism, intimidation, red-baiting, and out-and-out slander that Frank espouses. First, it is inaccurate to label the people and groups at that meeting—the International Socialist Organization (ISO), Military Families Speak Out (MFSO), and DC Antiwar Network—as the "ideological fringe of the losing side." The ISO, of which I am member, does not represent or endorse John Kerry or the Democratic Party. Nor did the majority of the people at that meeting. Second, in recent weeks, the ISO and other organizations have been working closely with MFSO and Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW) to help them organize a tour of Boston to spread their message. While MFSO and IVAW have no official position on the resistance, they do share our belief in the right of the Iraqi people to self-determination and freedom from U.S. military occupation and would never confuse such statements as supporting terrorism.

No one involved in the antiwar movement supports suicide bombings, kidnappings, or attacks on Iraqi civilians. But the occupation is the reason there is violence. Also, there was no organized resistance to speak of in Iraq until soldiers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WHY THE MUSLIM WORLD TUNED OUT THE INAUGURATION
THE NEW REPUBLIC
THE LAST CASUALTY
LAWRENCE F. KAPLAN ON THE DEATH OF LIBERALISM IN IRAQ

started firing on peaceful demonstrators. It's hard to imagine that the number of deaths attributable to the resistance even approaches those caused by U.S. bombing. Lastly, Frank's article distorts not only what was said by the speakers, but also the atmosphere of the meeting. Stan Goff and Shujaa Graham spoke with compassion about the plight that has befallen not only Iraqis, but also Americans as a result of the war. People at that meeting shed tears. They hugged and shook hands afterward, and, if Frank was not moved by the power and humanity he saw in that "low-budget church," I feel sorry for him.

IAN FLETCHER
Boston, Massachusetts

I ENJOYED FRANK'S AMUSING ARTICLE about the counter-inaugural event held by the ISO in Washington in January. And I completely sympathize with his urge to join whatever side the extremists in front of him were not on. I'm sure he can also understand the urge that fills me whenever I'm stuck listening to Grover Norquist unleash yet another rant comparing progressive taxation to fascism or cannibalism or some other awful ism. Suddenly, I'm overcome by an impulse to round him up along with all his co-believers and chain them all to the "wheel of pain" (as seen in *Conan the Barbarian*). They can spend all day grinding grain into flour that will be distributed free to homeless drug addicts, while an endless loop of "Share The Land" by The Guess Who plays in the background. Maybe then a 38.5 percent top tax bracket won't look so unreasonable!

AARON BERKOWITZ
Glen Ellyn, Illinois

T.A. FRANK RESPONDS:
I'm glad to hear from Stan Goff that Arnold has ignored my ideas—so have many people, often to everyone's advantage. But I think if Goff were to check out the Conservative Political Action Conference, he'd see how his counterparts on the radical right have learned to game the system and win. Meanwhile, Goff and company "disrupt shit" and go home to Bush on television. As for Ian Fletcher, I'm aware that the ISO is not a branch of the Democratic Party. Nor does it have meaningful institutional ties to MFSO or IVAW, despite its attempts to cozy up to them. Fletcher may think poorly of the insurgents, but I refer him to the *Socialist Worker* of January 21, in which columnist Sharon Smith explains "why you should support the Iraqi resistance." The ISO prides itself on championing freedom of speech, equal rights for women, and abolition of the death penalty. Too bad Iraqis who espouse such ideals are being mowed down by the insurgents that the ISO and Arundhati Roy tell us to support. Aaron Berkowitz's wheel-of-pain suggestion is compelling, and I support most of his proposals. Since I consider myself a moderate, though, I have to recommend that flour allocations go first to any homeless drug addicts who choose to participate in a sensitively calibrated workfare program. ■

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Redefining the School Leader

KURT M. LANDGRAF,
PRESIDENT & CEO, ETS

The job description of today's school leader is a far cry from what it was just a generation ago.

Changing demographics, education reform, and an expanding view of schools' role in our society have redefined the roles and responsibilities of school superintendents, principals, and administrators up and down the line.

Today, school leaders are under pressure to close performance gaps; raise test scores; manage budgets; attract, develop and retain highly qualified teachers; monitor policy and the law; even address students' physical and mental health.

These new responsibilities make sense. What goes on in school is critical, but it is not the only factor in determining how — or even whether — students learn. Research and experience prove that when it comes to academic performance, things such as nutrition, family involvement, and political support matter.

And school leaders are responding accordingly. In New Jersey's Trenton Central High School, for example, school leaders are engaging the community through such initiatives as a monthly "Family Literacy Night," which helps parents participate in their children's education, and a "Parent Linking Network," which supports parents trying to motivate their children to stay in school and succeed academically. ETS is proud to be working with Trenton High on these and other efforts to improve student performance.

If we're going to expect more of school leaders, then we need to support them more. Certainly, they need the financial resources to equip their schools with the necessities of modern education — from textbooks and technology to professional staffs that make learning possible.

School leaders also need a framework for action. The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium has developed an excellent model in its *Standards for School Leaders*. The consortium stresses that school leaders should be committed to creating safe and supportive learning environments and collaborating with families and the community in support of learning.

ETS stands ready to work with schools and districts that are committed to improvement and meeting tough challenges, just as we've been working with Trenton Central High School in its reform efforts.

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Hey, Big Spender

TRB

FROM ANN ARBOR

IN A CLASSIC EPISODE OF "The Simpsons" that first aired in 1993, Grampa Simpson, the doddering family patriarch, unexpectedly starts receiving checks in the mail. But, rather than ponder the source of his good fortune, he just shrugs and takes the money. Eventually somebody asks, "Didn't you wonder why you were getting checks for absolutely nothing?" Grampa answers, "I figured 'cause the Democrats are in power again."

No, this was not a ham-handed effort to channel Fox News dogma through the network's famous cartoon show. It was, rather, an accurate reflection of the Democratic Party's public image in the early '90s—one to which Washington pundits still cling tenaciously. Even though it's George W. Bush and the Republicans who have been running up all the red ink lately, pundits continue to bash Democrats as pathological big spenders unwilling to confront the exploding costs of entitlement programs benefiting the elderly. Last month, when *New York Times* columnist David Brooks decided to chastise Republicans for excessive spending on the Medicare prescription-drug bill, he also made sure to indict Democrats "who loudly jeer at Republican deficits but whose own entitlement proposals would make the situation twice as bad." And, on last Sunday's edition of NBC's "Meet the Press," when the discussion turned to Bush's Social Security privatization proposal, Joe Klein of *Time* derided Democratic opposition to it as just another example of the party's shortsighted obstructionism. "The Democrats have, for the last 10 or 15 years, blatantly, shamelessly demagogued this issue," Klein said. "They've offered nothing positive on Social Security or on Medicare or on Medicaid."

You can expect to read and hear many more quotes like these in the next few weeks. For the advocates of privatization, it's an effective way of shaming Democrats into breaking ranks with the party leadership and embracing a compromise. For pundits and news reporters, it's a quick and easy way to maintain the appearance of evenhandedness on the most politicized debate of the day.

But have Democrats really been as fiscally reckless as the Republicans? Recent history would seem to suggest otherwise. One of the most effective ways to prepare for future entitlement spending is to manage the budget responsibly now—since, among other things, lower deficits today mean less debt to pay off tomorrow. And, when Democrats have had the power to shape budgets in the last decade or so, that's exactly what they have done. In 1993, President Clinton ditched campaign promises for substantial public works spending in order to concentrate on reducing the deficit, pushing through his budget with nary a Republican vote. Later in the decade, when the booming economy turned those reduced deficits into actual surpluses and Republicans were salivating over the prospect of lucrative new tax breaks, Clinton responded by arguing that government should keep paying down its existing debt in order to "save Social Security first." In 2000, Al Gore promised more of the same, vowing to create a "lockbox" that would legally guarantee that monies now spent retiring the government's debt would be used to finance Social Security. The worthy (if widely mocked) idea died with his presidential bid. But Democrats have continued to press the case for fiscal responsibility since then, frequently proposing to repeal Bush's deficit-inducing tax cuts or, at the very least, allowing them to expire in 2011.

One reason Democrats don't get much credit for this sensible budget stewardship is that they won't embrace the radical overhauls of entitlement programs that the Republican majority, which controls the political agenda, has put up for discussion. But the Democrats have perfectly valid reasons for opposing those changes. Never mind that privatizing Social Security or turning Medicare and Medicaid into voucher schemes would expose retirees to much greater financial risk. It turns out that Republican plans for these programs don't even do a very good job of making the programs more affordable. After all, it's the Republican plan for Social Security privatization that anticipates the federal government borrowing trillions of dollars in "transition funds" in order to pay current beneficiaries while younger workers start their investment accounts. (Privatization advocates argue that these transition costs don't matter, because they merely force the government to take out a loan equal to the amount it already owes—as an implicit debt—to future retirees. But many economists worry that the bond markets will react much more harshly to this new, "explicit" debt.) And it's the Republican plan for Medicare that lards up the program with tens of billions of dollars in subsidies to the private insurance industry. (Remember, Democrats advocated a much more cost-effective approach that envisioned the government using its massive bargaining power to negotiate cheaper pharmaceutical prices.) Writers like Brooks and Klein may still prefer conservative entitlement reforms on purely philosophical grounds; Klein, for one, seems to think the whole concept of social insurance is a relic of the industrial age. But, then, Democrats are hardly being demagogic for saying they don't agree. They're merely standing up for a different set of values.

Democrats deserve a little more credit in the budget debate for one other, highly underappreciated action. When you look at the long-term picture for the federal budget, financing future Social Security benefits are really just a small part of the problem. The real trouble is with the price of the two government health insurance programs, Medicare and Medicaid. And, while the aging of the population has a lot to do with this—one-quarter of Medicaid spending is on the elderly—so does the skyrocketing cost of medical wares and services. Assuming Americans decide they don't want to keep spending so lavishly on their health, they will have to come up with an agreeable method for deciding exactly what medical care they do want to pay for. The honest way to do this would be to put forward an ambitious health care reform plan and confront, head-on, all the trade-offs between spending, access, and quality of care. A decade ago, one political party tried to do this. The other answered with grotesque demagoguery. Guess which party did which. (Hint: Think Harry and Louise.)

Of course, a senile old man like Grampa Simpson could be forgiven for forgetting this bit of history. But what's the pundits' excuse?

JONATHAN COHN

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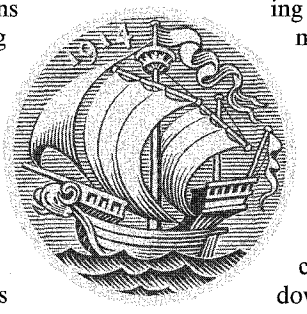
Grudging Respect

GIVE LIBERALS CREDIT. Rather than churlishly dismiss signs that the White House may have jump-started Middle Eastern democratization, most liberals have taken the responsible course and applauded recent developments in Lebanon, Egypt, and Iraq. "The Bush administration is entitled to claim a healthy share of the credit for many of these advances," wrote the granddaddy of liberal opinion, *The New York Times* editorial page. Ted Kennedy seconded that sentiment on ABC's "This Week": "What's taken place in a number of those countries is enormously constructive. It's a reflection the president has been involved." Hardly the peevish response many conservatives privately expected.

But, if liberals aren't blinded by partisanship when assessing the dramatic events of these last few weeks, their response does have a certain grudging quality (reflective perhaps not only of discomfort with George W. Bush, but also regret that Bill Clinton did not make democratization in the Middle East *his* obsession). One detects this reluctance especially in the tendency to dwell far more on potential setbacks than opportunities, and to focus on advances in parts of the world where the administration can't plausibly claim credit. Take, for example, the preeminent liberal blog, *Daily Kos*, which spent thousands upon thousands of words chewing over Ukraine's Orange Revolution. So far, it has featured only two short posts on Lebanon's equally stirring Cedar Revolution—and both were notable mostly for their pessimism.

This is unfortunate. The administration's record of foreign policy cynicism and ineptitude is not easily forgotten (or forgiven). But it is precisely because of this track record that liberals must speak with a strong voice in the coming debate about democratization. Let us not lose sight of what is at stake. Democratic governments in Lebanon, Iraq, and Egypt would constitute dramatic improvements in the lives of millions of people and put the three most contemptible regimes in the region—Iran, Syria, and Saudi Arabia—under intense pressure to reform. Were that effort to succeed, it would represent a significant blow against terrorism and a significant improvement in the security of the United States.

But liberal democracy is more than just regime change and elections. It can succeed only if it is cultivated—which means devoting time and money to building civil institutions like a free press, nurturing liberal political parties and politicians, and generally inculcating liberal values through all available means, including popular culture. The administration has neglected many of these vital tasks in Iraq. There is little reason to expect it to perform much better in Lebanon. That makes it all the more incumbent upon liberals to offer detailed initiatives of their own.



In fact, given the administration's global reputation, it is hard to imagine its democratization efforts succeeding without domestic support from liberals. The United States, after all, comes to the project with dirty hands, having shown disdain for democracy in the twentieth century by toppling popularly elected leaders and supporting authoritarian governments when it served our narrow interests. The administration has, in many cases, only worsened these perceptions, most obviously at Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo, which had a devastating impact on world public opinion. American liberals, who have denounced these developments, will be central to persuading the world of the sincerity of U.S. intentions.

Beyond this contribution, liberals must realize their own future is at stake. Should democratization succeed with Democrats deeply involved, they will be able to claim a share of the credit. But, should it succeed despite their puerile detachment—or, worse, their objections—Democrats could well be branded as the party that opposes bringing human rights and responsible governance to people who don't yet benefit from them. And that could change U.S. politics for a generation.

More immediately, liberals must realize that they have to be willing to support the Bush administration in the Middle East if they want to have anything to say about democracy elsewhere in the world. Liberals rightly accuse the White House of talking up its democratic successes in the region while downplaying backsliding in places like Russia. But the same logic applies to the left. How can liberals be outspokenly in favor of democratization in Russia but only tepidly endorse it in Lebanon, just because an administration they detest might get credit for it? The answer is that they can't. When it comes to democracy-building, there's enough credit—and enough work—to go around. ■

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NOTEBOOK

FED CHAIRMAN, POLITICAL HACK . . . TSUNAMI AID MEETS GOP CUTBACK

SOMETIMES THE TRUTH HURTS

SENATE MINORITY LEADER HARRY Reid said something terribly impolite last week when he described Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan as a "political hack." And yet, to the extent that it's fair to describe Greenspan in two words or less, those two are as fair as any.

Greenspan has been an effective manager of monetary policy. He has also made a career of using his prestige to shill for Republican policies. In 1980, he assured the public that Ronald Reagan's plans to slash taxes and boost defense spending were "an exercise in reasonable budget-making." The result was massive deficits. In 2001, he endorsed Bush's tax cut on the bizarre, convoluted theory that failure to do so would quickly lead to the national debt being paid off completely, which would be followed by the government buying up private equities, tilting the U.S. economy toward socialism. Again, massive deficits were the result of the policy to which Greenspan left his imprimatur. At heart, Greenspan is a libertarian with a preference for smaller government, but he misleadingly couches those preferences in technocratic language.

Until last week, nobody in official Washington had been impolitic enough to point this out. Reid's observation was so shocking that his colleagues were pressed to renounce it. On "Meet the Press" last Sunday, Tim Russert asked Democratic Senator Dick Durbin, "Do you share [Reid's] view?" and pressed him again, "But should the chairman of the Federal Reserve be described as a political hack?" This is precisely the problem. Greenspan feels free to use the prestige derived from his apolitical role to advance his political preferences. But then, if anybody wants to criticize him, he's The Chairman Of The Federal Reserve, a figure above reproach. So, to answer Russert: No, the chairman of the Federal Reserve should not be described as a political hack. But that's because the chairman of the Federal Reserve should not be a political hack.

Alan Greenspan

DR. DEAN'S BAD MEDICINE

DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL HEADQUARters in Washington, where Howard Dean now resides, isn't the only place where the spirit of Dean's presidential campaign lives on. In recent weeks, at least three state Democratic parties—in Colorado, North Carolina, and Arkansas—have dumped longtime party "insiders" for liberal activists who promise to reconnect with the party's allegedly neglected "grassroots." This, of course, has long been Dr. Dean's prescription; unfortunately, it amounts to political malpractice. While Democrats have recently struggled in North Carolina, for instance, the party did retain the governorship last fall; yet it was the governor's handpicked operative who was ousted by liberal activists. In Arkansas, the party can boast two Democratic senators—but the two-term state party chairman there was nevertheless dumped for a 34-year-old insurgent. And, in Colorado this week, a faction of liberals—"many of whom are new to party activism," as *The Denver Post* put it—ousted an establishment insider, even though Democrats won a House and Senate seat and reclaimed the legislature there last fall, making the state one of 2004's few bright spots.

In each case, activists argued that the party had fared poorly during the 2004 presidential campaign (John Kerry lost all three states). But their belief that the Democrats' problem in southern and western states was a failure to connect with grassroots, as opposed to a candidate with a disastrous cultural profile, reveals a dangerous naïveté—one that threatens to dash what little hope these Democrats now have in their backyards.

HOUSE GOP: BAD WILL HUNTING

PRESIDENT BUSH HAS BEEN TRUMpeting the U.S. response to the deadly Indian Ocean tsunami as having not only alleviated the suffering of millions throughout the devastated region, but also for helping to improve the U.S. image abroad and buying us some much-needed goodwill in the greater Muslim world. But now, House Republicans—perhaps with tacit approval from the White House—are doing their best to undercut those benefits.

According to *The New York Times*, "[T]he [House] appropriations committee recommended spending $656 million on tsunami disaster relief, $45 million less than what Mr. Bush had requested. It also recommended cutting $570 million requested by the White House for reconstruction projects in Afghanistan." The House's miserliness, if successful, will vindicate those in the Middle East and Europe who argue that the United States does not really care to help poor,

DAVID COWLES

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struggling democracies like Afghanistan and that we will not commit the resources needed to make nation-building successful. This flies in the face not only of our humanitarian impulse, but also of our own self-interest. Stabilizing Afghanistan and Indonesia, and enhancing our image in those countries, could save us more tomorrow than it will cost us today.

But the House GOP is myopic. Overall, they seek to cut Bush's $5.6 billion foreign aid proposal nearly in half. They are doing so not to balance the budget (nor would these cuts make a real dent in the deficit anyway), but rather because they wish to add $1.8 billion in spending to military operations.

Will Bush use his clout on the Hill to get his foreign aid spending restored? We are doubtful. This smells like another one of Bush's disingenuous ploys, where he makes a reasonable proposal (say, cutting farm subsidies) knowing full well that Republicans in Congress will block it. Bush then quietly lets the issue die, while taking credit for "trying" to find a middle ground with the other half of the country and the rest of the world, while congressional Republicans can return to their districts and brag that they "saved farm subsidies" or, in this case, "held down spending."

DEPARTMENT OF CONGRATULATIONS

TNR APPLAUDS EDITOR PETER Beinart on being named *The Week* magazine's columnist of the year. Beinart is currently on leave writing a book.

DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

DUE TO A TECHNICAL ERROR, SOME information was obscured on page four of the March 14 issue, including the cover date (March 14, 2005), the print date (March 3, 2005), the volume (232, number 9), and the issue number (4,704). We regret the error. ■

TNR.commentary

&c.

NOAM SCHEIBER

BACK-DOOR PRIVATIZATION: The March 3 edition of *The Washington Post* brings word that the White House is pressing ahead with its privatization campaign full speed. Three things strike me about this latest twist in the Social Security debate.

First, the reason the White House is digging in its heels despite really, really bad signals from the Hill is that it knows it instantly loses a ton of power if it loses this debate. Four years is a long time to be a lame duck.

The second point follows from the first. Since the White House knows it has to come away with something or else risk extended lame-duckness, I suspect we'll eventually see every effort to forge a compromise. And the compromise I expect is add-on accounts—i.e., private investment accounts that supplement your Social Security check, not partially replace it—which even the AARP is on the record as supporting.

This paragraph from the *Post* is pretty suggestive in this respect:

> [Treasury Secretary John] Snow told reporters that Bush also has not ruled out embracing a plan backed by many Democrats to create government-subsidized personal savings accounts outside the existing system. White House officials are privately telling Republicans that Bush is opposed to the idea but does not want to say so because it would appear he is not willing to compromise.

My hunch is that Bush actually is willing to compromise on add-on accounts, he just doesn't want to do it until the last minute, so as not to undercut his bargaining position and encourage further Republican defections.

But, as I've argued before—and, as *New York Times* columnist Paul Krugman pointed out last week—add-on accounts are a really bad deal for Democrats, since they represent a back door into privatization. Here's how it works: Republicans create add-on accounts today, then, a couple years down the road, once people are familiar with the concept (and once the government's finances are in even worse shape as a result of this new spending), Republicans allow you to voluntarily divert a portion of your Social Security contribution into these accounts in exchange for benefit cuts, which will then create all the huge problems associated with privatization.

The trick for Democrats interested in creating add-on accounts is to differentiate them as much as possible from the current Social Security system, which would make it harder to enact the voluntary diversion scheme down the road. (Totally separate language, funding mechanism, et cetera.) But, since that would be the whole idea behind Republican support for add-on accounts, I think that's going to be impossible for Democrats to achieve. If I were Harry Reid, I'd resist this approach at all costs.

IRAQ'D

SPENCER ACKERMAN

"WHITE ARABISM": One of the ironies about this tremendously hopeful moment in the Middle East is that the Iraqi political process that played at least some catalytic role in the region is currently stalled by persistent sectarianism. And, while it's perfectly understandable that worldwide attention should shift to Beirut's Martyrs' Square, it would be awfully counterproductive to neglect the difficulties in Iraq now that the January election is history, sending the message that merely the form, and not the substance, of democracy can satisfy the world's expectations.

I met with Iraqi liberal politician Mithal Al Alusi last Friday to discuss the emerging reformist politics of the Middle East. Alusi is far outside the Iraqi political mainstream. He's an unapologetic champion of robust de-Baathification and an alliance—not just normalization—with Israel. For this, his two sons were brutally murdered by insurgents last month. Despite his loss, Alusi is an undeterred advocate for a human rights-centric politics. Beirut lawyer Chibli Mallat terms this strain "White Arabism" in a recent essay on the *Bitter Lemons* website, though whether it will cohere into an actual movement remains to be seen.

While Alusi is confident that the era of Arab autocracy is mortally wounded, he's "really worried" about Iraq. He argues that the dominant Ibrahim Jaafari–led wing of the United Iraqi Alliance is a stalking horse for Iran. The danger, as Alusi sees it, is that Iraq will exchange one form of illiberalism for another—leaving a nascent White Arabism with little political breathing room. "Our democracy is a small, beautiful baby," he says. "And we have to make sure it won't be handicapped from birth." Protecting the "baby" will be an Iraqi responsibility. But it doesn't do the reform movements in the Middle East any disservice for the international community to point out, consistently, that the baby needs protection in Iraq as well as in Martyrs' Square.

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Strife in the AFL-CIO.

Labored Steps

BY JOHN B. JUDIS

LAS VEGAS, NEVADA

AFL-CIO PRESIDENT John Sweeney is known for his bromides, and, at the opening of the Federation's semiannual executive council meeting, he didn't disappoint. "I think the labor movement has done some pretty great things over the last years," he declared on February 28. But, at this three-day meeting, his studied complacency was punctured by threats, accusations, denunciations, and hand-wringing from the more than 50 union presidents who had come to Las Vegas. Seated in the dreary conference halls of Bally's Hotel—suitably distanced from the smoke, glitter, and incessant bleeping of slot machines in the lobby—the union leaders engaged in what Sweeney reluctantly acknowledged was a "fierce" debate about the Federation's future.

It's an important debate. Since its founding in 1955, the AFL-CIO has provided the largest counterweight to business interests, both in the workplace and in Washington. But, as the labor movement's share of the workforce has declined, the Federation has lost power. The union presidents desperately want to halt that decline, but disagreement about how to do so has been acute, reaching new heights at the Las Vegas meeting, where the issue of structural reforms dominated the agenda. That's too bad, because the solution to the Federation's problem lies elsewhere: in finding an effective replacement for John Sweeney.

UNDER SWEENEY'S LEADERSHIP, from 1996 through 2004, the labor movement has lost 797,000 members, and the percentage of unionized workers has dropped 2 percentage points. Worse, the Carpenters' Union, one of the largest and most successful construction unions, quit the AFL-CIO, charging that Sweeney was squandering its resources. The Service Employees International Union (SEIU), the Federation's largest union, is threatening to leave, and UNITE HERE, the union of needle trades and hotel workers, might follow the SEIU out the door. A host of other large unions, including the Teamsters, the Laborers, and the United Food and Commercial Workers, have questioned his leadership as well.

Sweeney aides blame these defections on the frustrated ambitions of union presidents and maintain that the labor movement would have shrunk regardless of what the Federation did. They further argue that, if Sweeney had not replaced former AFL-CIO President Lane Kirkland in 1995, it would have declined even faster. Said one top Sweeney aide, "In 1995, the movement was moribund. That's not true today. There has been progress. At the end of Kirkland's term, it was zero." But, in Kirkland's last full eight years as president, from 1986 to 1994, operating under similar political and economic handicaps, the labor movement lost only 235,000 members. Kirkland also brought the Teamsters and the United Auto Workers back into the AFL-CIO.

Some Sweeney backers acknowledge his difficulties in organizing workers but praise him for reviving the Federation's political operations. His staff claims that the Federation has boosted turnout of union households from 19 percent in 1992 and 14 percent in 1994 to 26 percent in 2000. "We are responsible for a quarter of the electorate," political director Karen Ackerman said when asked if she were concerned about expanding the Federation's political work beyond union households.

But the claim of increased turnout rests on questionable figures from Voter News Service (VNS) polls. As Ruy Teixeira of the Century Foundation has written, VNS showed a dramatic rise in the labor vote after 1994 because it replaced a survey method that underestimated turnout with one that probably overestimated it. Relying on other extensive post-election polls, including the Current Population Survey, Harvard economist Richard Freeman estimates that the percentage of union voters in the electorate actually *fell* 1 percent between 1990 and 2000 and that the percentage of voters in union households fell 2 percent in the same period.

SWEENEY'S PERFORMANCE HAS privately aroused the ire of many union presidents, but, over the last year, his opposition has become chiefly identified with Andrew Stern, the lean, gray-haired president of the SEIU. Where the AFL-CIO president is genial and diffident, Stern, who was originally Sweeney's protégé, is pugnacious and confrontational—and he says the labor movement needs new leadership. "We must change the [AFL-CIO] bureaucracy, and not simply keep doing the same old political program," Stern wrote on an SEIU website during the meeting. And Stern has been rumored to be urging John Wilhelm, a president of UNITE HERE, to challenge Sweeney. But Stern and his allies have not launched an open challenge to Sweeney's reelection, which will be decided this July. Instead, Stern has launched a complicated set of structural proposals that will not necessarily solve any of the Federation's problems. And he has done so in a manner that has focused the debate on his own contentiousness rather than on Sweeney's deficiencies.

Last fall, Stern put out a ten-point program called Unite to Win and threatened to bolt the AFL-CIO if it were not adopted. Sweeney had previously championed some of these proposals, but lacked the clout to get them accepted. But two of Stern's ideas went beyond anything Sweeney had proposed. One called on the AFL-CIO to force smaller unions to merge into larger unions that would be limited to specific sectors of manufacturing and service work, and to discourage larger unions from organizing outside of an assigned sector. Smaller

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unions, including highly successful ones like the Firefighters, resented this idea. Industrial unions that have expanded beyond manufacturing, such as the Steelworkers, saw Stern's proposal as an attempt to monopolize service workers.

Stern and the SEIU also proposed that unions spending significant amounts on organizing should get back half of the dues they now pay to the AFL-CIO. Because it would cut the Federation's budget, that proposal was seen as a threat to the AFL-CIO's political and legislative program and was resisted by unions like the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME); the American Federation of Teachers (AFT); and the Communications Workers of America, all of which depend upon electing sympathetic legislators for their success.

Altogether, Stern's actions may have actually strengthened Sweeney. Many union officials interpreted Stern's threat to bolt as a gesture of contempt toward them and the AFL-CIO. One union official described Stern as a "millstone" around the neck of the unions that want Sweeney replaced. Unions that had previously railed against Sweeney and his staff, another official explained, "are supporting Sweeney because they hate Stern more."

In Las Vegas, Stern dropped his widely unpopular demand for forced mergers; instead, he supported a Teamster proposal to rebate some dues for organizing, while indirectly encouraging mergers. But that proposal was defeated 15 to seven by the Federation's Executive Committee. It's just as well: Neither rebates nor mergers would solve the Federation's problems. The record among U.S. unions—including the SEIU and the AFSCME, the AFT and the National Education Association, and the pre-merger AFL and CIO themselves—is that competition over recruits has actually encouraged organizing. And there is little reason to believe that rebating part of a union's dues would dramatically spur organizing—but it would definitely put the AFL-CIO's legislative and political program in jeopardy.

Stern and his allies promised to carry these proposals to the convention in July. "We'll keep fighting until we win," he asserted at a press briefing after the vote. Meanwhile, at a later press conference, Sweeney declared the three-day meeting a success—"We've taken some big first steps here," he said. But, if the current bitter infighting persists and leads to more defections from the Federation, neither faction will win. Instead of insisting that "great things" have happened, Sweeney needs to recognize that he has lost his authority as president and step down. Indeed, that is what Kirkland did in 1995 when he found himself facing a similar revolt. And, instead of trying to stir up a debate over mergers and rebates, Stern needs to acknowledge that what the Federation needs first and foremost is not a new structure, but a new leader. As one internal memo from a Federation leader put it, "Even if a structure could be created that answered many of the current problems facing the movement, if it were led by an incompetent leader, little would be accomplished."

A new president could give the AFL-CIO the public presence it lacks under the reserved Sweeney (who even reads dutifully from a text in executive council meetings) and could take advantage of the growing consensus within the Federation that more effort has to be put into organizing. Sweeney can't do that—not because he has the wrong ideas, but because too many union leaders are no longer listening to him. The AFL-CIO would probably be best off bending its constitution to reach outside its ranks to a former pro-labor politician like Representative Richard Gephardt, but that's unlikely to happen when the AFL-CIO convenes in Chicago. What's more likely is that the fierce debate over personalities and side issues will continue, and the Federation will continue to founder. ■

Court outsourcing.

Juvenile Logic

BY JEFFREY ROSEN

The morning after the Supreme Court struck down the juvenile death penalty as a form of cruel and unusual punishment in *Roper* v. *Simmons*, the reaction in the Supreme Court press room was unusually scathing. A liberal journalist lamented that, ever since Justice Anthony Kennedy, who wrote the 5-4 opinion for the Court, styled himself as a judicial statesman, he has become insufferable, out of control, and "deserves to be slapped." A conservative journalist chimed in that the decision was embarrassing, because the justices had imposed their own moral preferences on the country without attempting to convince those who disagreed.

The consensus among our ideologically diverse little band was revealing. *Roper* v. *Simmons* is indeed embarrassing. Social conservatives view it as the latest symptom of the internationalization of the culture wars, with U.S. courts striking down traditional practices in the name of purported international moral values. But there is a liberal case against *Roper* as well. It is analytically sloppy and glib in its attempt to impose an international consensus where none in fact exists. And liberals should be wary about relying too heavily on international consensus. To the degree that foreign authorities do agree about moral values in other cases involving basic rights, they tend to be far less consistently progressive than liberals assume.

Kennedy begins his opinion by declaring that a "national consensus" against executing 16- and 17-year-olds has developed since the Court upheld the juvenile death penalty in 1989. But, 15 years ago, 25 out of the 37 states that allowed the death penalty also allowed juvenile executions; today, only four

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states have changed their minds. As Justice Antonin Scalia argued in one of his most effective dissents, "Words have no meaning if the views of less than 50% of death penalty States can constitute a national consensus."

The Supreme Court in the past has performed a legitimate role in bringing a handful of outlier states in line with genuine national consensus, as it did in 1977, when it held that the Eighth Amendment prohibited the death penalty for rape in a case where only one jurisdiction in the nation authorized the punishment. But, to prevent a majority of death-penalty states from retaining a long-standing practice because a narrow majority of all states have repudiated it is hard to reconcile with federalism—a value that Kennedy, in other cases, has made the centerpiece of his relentlessly activist judicial philosophy.

Kennedy goes on to say that justices should consult their "own judgment" in deciding whether 16- and 17-year-old murderers can be considered as legally culpable as their older counterparts. Citing hotly contested psychological studies, he announces that juveniles are less culpable than adults. But surely this is a moral as well as a psychological question, about which reasonable citizens (and reasonable scientists) disagree. Indeed, for centuries, Americans and Europeans have been at odds about precisely this moral question. "Europeans are inheritors of a canon law tradition that strictly limits the punishment of minors on the theory that minors can't form the same criminal intent as adults," says James Whitman of Yale Law School. By contrast, the English and U.S. common law tradition has taken a very different view. If Kennedy's decision were carried to its logical conclusion, it might call into question not only the juvenile death penalty, but also the substantive criminal law in many U.S. states.

Kennedy is unconcerned about trumping American values with foreign ones. In the most controversial part of his opinion, he claims that "international authorities" are "instructive" when the Supreme Court interprets the Constitution. Conservatives were alarmed when Kennedy cited international authorities in striking down U.S. sodomy laws two years ago. His careless treatment of international public opinion in *Roper* has vindicated their fears. Kennedy notes that all countries but the United States and Somalia have ratified the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child, which prohibits the death penalty for criminals under 18. But, of course, the reason the United States refused to ratify the convention was because the White House and Congress judged the prohibition on the juvenile death penalty inconsistent with the values of the American people. For the Court to invoke this treaty as purported support for its own contrary judgment about American values is perverse—and should give liberals, who believe in democratic principles, no reason to cheer.

Kennedy is also wrong to suggest that it's possible to generalize meaningfully about a purported international consensus on any hotly contested issue involving life or death, crime or punishment. As the European response to September 11 shows, the United Kingdom, France, and Germany disagree dramatically about the appropriate line between privacy and security. And, as Franklin E. Zimring argues in *The Contradictions of American Capital Punishment*, large majorities of citizens in Great Britain, Germany, Canada, and Australia favored the death penalty when liberal elites persuaded their governments to abolish it in the postwar period and continued to support it for years after. It was only after most national governments in Europe had abolished the death penalty on their own initiative that the Council of Europe states came to condemn it as a violation of human rights. Moreover, as Whitman suggests, the reason that majorities in some European countries came to oppose the death penalty in recent years reflects a growing commitment to secularism that is absent in the United States. "In a strongly Christian country like the U.S., there's a philosophical tradition that allows us to talk about the death penalty as if it gives meaning to the life of the accused by encouraging repentance," says Whitman.

Of course, it's hard to see why the views of European states that have abolished the death penalty should be relevant evidence of an international consensus about the juvenile death penalty. The relevant states are those that have retained the death penalty. And Kennedy's treatment of social attitudes there is sloppy. He notes, for example, that only a handful of countries have executed juvenile offenders since 1990 but fails to examine the case of Japan, the death-penalty country that most resembles the United States—but which has a different definition of juveniles. Japan allows the execution of 18- and 19-year-olds, but explicitly categorizes them as "juvenile offenders," since, in Japan, the age of majority for most purposes (including voting and marriage without parental consent) is 20. Japan, then, is an example of a market democracy that allows juvenile executions.

CONSERVATIVES ARE RIGHT to fear the internationalization of the culture wars—that is, the danger that American traditions will be struck down in the name of international values. But liberals should fear this development as well. Kenneth Anderson of the Washington College of Law predicts that, in the wake of *Roper*, citations to international authorities "will spread throughout the U.S. judicial system like an Internet virus—because *both* sides will have to assume in any litigation that it now matters." We may soon see shaky claims about a purported international consensus invoked in cases ranging from corporate litigation to free speech. And liberal values will hardly be reliable winners. As Jack Goldsmith of Harvard Law School suggests, the U.S. constitutional tradition tends to be much more libertarian and protective of rights than the European one in cases involving hate speech, defamation, abortion, and criminal procedure. If the German Constitutional Court's vision of abortion or free speech were imposed on the United States, for example, liberals would protest in the streets.

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Eventually, Congress may have to step in to curb this mess, just as it has done every time the Supreme Court has attempted to thwart a determined national majority. (Congressional Republicans have already introduced a resolution stating that judicial decisions should not be based on international law.) With characteristic passive-aggressiveness, the Court has struck down a practice that appears to get the support of significant minorities in local polls. (Narrow national majorities support the practice when there is a specific murderer attached to the question, such as the Beltway sniper.) But *Roper* is an invitation to the worst kind of judicial activism. The United States has been down this road before, during the Warren era, and liberals have only just begun to wean themselves of the urge to fight their battles in courts rather than legislatures. This time around, courts are even less likely to be predictable supporters of the values of American liberals, who will come once again to regret having succumbed to the temptations of activism. ■

Beirut Dispatch

Cedar Siding

BY ANDREW LEE BUTTERS

IT'S HARD TO find anyone who hasn't gotten excited about what has taken place in Beirut since the assassination of Rafik Hariri, the former prime minister. For the hip young demonstrators who gather downtown every evening to protest the Syrian occupation of Lebanon, the collapse last week of their country's pro-Syrian government was a big step closer to the modern political culture they desire. For weary foreign journalists stumbling in from Iraq, this is the best riot they've ever covered. They can collect a few quotes, in English or French, from a stunning girl in stiletto boots waving a flag in Martyrs' Square, and then drink a few cocktails in the nearby nightclubs. For a U.S. administration eager to see Lebanon as a success story, these young protesters are the perfect poster children for Arab democracy. The State Department even calls this the Cedar Revolution, after the biblical cedar of Lebanon, the green icon on the country's red-and-white flag.

The nickname is unintentionally apt: Like Lebanon's cedars, which are rapidly dying out, the Cedar Revolution is thin on the ground, since the country remains far more divided than most outsiders realize. Even as pro-democracy demonstrators march in Beirut, Lebanon's largest religious group, the Shia, remain alienated by events in the capital. So alienated, in fact, that this week they mounted a pro-Syria, pro-Hezbollah counterdemonstration that drew at least half a million people, dwarfing the 70,000 people who participated in the largest of the Cedar Revolution demonstrations.

THE ONE POINT that almost everyone in Beirut agrees on is that the Syrians have played their hand badly. By forcing the extension in September of President Émile Lahoud's term for another three years, rather than just finding another Syrian stooge to take his place, Damascus called attention to the way their intelligence services run Lebanon like a vast racketeering scheme, allegedly selling off seats in parliament to Lebanese politicians. And, because Lahoud's extension paved the way for the resignation of Hariri, who hated Lahoud, it was predictable that the blame for his death would fall upon Syria and that his assassination would catalyze anti-Syrian opposition. This opposition is demanding that Syria—which has some 14,000 soldiers in Lebanon—withdraw its troops. Once the Syrians leave, the Cedar demonstrators argue, Lebanon can become a normal country again.

The problem is that Lebanon is not a normal country. It is the most diverse country in the Middle East—with some 17 recognized religious sects. It waged a destructive civil war that raged for 15 years, ending only in 1990 when the Syrian army—with a wink from the United States, which needed Syria's help during the first Gulf war—invaded Lebanon and disarmed most warring militias. Under the Syrian occupation, and with cheap Syrian labor, the Lebanese rebuilt their country and transformed Beirut into a glittering pleasure dome. But the legacy of war remains. Politics still revolves around sectarian conflict: Lebanon hasn't taken a population census since 1932 because the ratio of Sunni to Shia to Christians is an explosive subject. "Lebanon is a country with a lot of baggage, and the opposition is only dealing with part of it—Syrian withdrawal," says Reinould Leenders, the Beirut-based Middle East analyst for the International Crisis Group. "It's going to be hard to reform the sectarian system even if the Syrians leave."

Ironically, the groups leading the Cedar Revolution are ones that have benefited most from the stability of the Syrian occupation, which has allowed them to rebuild Lebanon's tourism and finance sectors and other industries dominated by Beirut. It's an unmistakably well-to-do Beirut crowd, with young people in designer clothes toting cell phones and tying Lebanese flags to their BMWs. It's also an unmistakably Christian crowd: Not a single Muslim party has set up a tent in Martyrs' Square, the center of the Cedar Revolution, and there are few women wearing Muslim headscarves in the gathering.

The Shia, meanwhile, remain the poorest group in the country, though the main Shia political party is Hezbollah, whose militia is supported by Syria. Hezbollah's political wing is the largest block in the Lebanese parliament; the organization owes its popularity among Lebanese to the

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fact that they see it as the only group in the world to have defeated the Israeli army, which occupied parts of Lebanon from 1982 until 2000. And, though the Shia have not benefited as much economically from the Syrian occupation, in the slums of Beirut and the poor south of Lebanon, Israel remains the major enemy. "It's better to have the Syrians than the Americans or Israel," says Ibrahim Abbas, an 18-year-old barber in Ouzai, Beirut's biggest Shia neighborhood, where the walls are often covered in portraits of men killed in the war with Israel.

In fact, the residents of Ouzai are skeptical of the Cedar Revolution demonstrators, with whom they have little in common culturally, and Hezbollah's antipathy toward the Cedar demonstrators cements this doubt. (Hezbollah's opposition isn't surprising, since the group is backed by Syria, and the French/American U.N. resolution that calls for Syrian withdrawal also calls for the disarmament of all militias, a reference to Hezbollah, the only group other than the government allowed to wield its own militia.) "I think it's the American embassy that's bringing these people into Beirut," says Ali Haj, 40, a Hezbollah member who had just finished Friday prayers. "The Americans want to take away our weapons." And, even outside Shia areas, more religious Lebanese, too, are suspicious of liberal Christian protestors. In Tripoli, Lebanon's second-biggest city—dominated by Sunnis—the strict religious atmosphere is evident in the city center, Allah Square, where there are more beards than bared midriffs, and almost as many pictures of Syrian President Bashar Assad as of Hariri. Last Saturday, large crowds gathered there to pay respects for the deceased sister of former Prime Minister Omar Karami, head of the recently collapsed pro-Syrian government. The event took on the air of a protest of the government's collapse, with angry young men walking to Karami's office, where, according to supporters, the family received some 20,000 visitors. That evening, crowds gathered again in Tripoli to show support for the Syrian president.

THE DIVIDE BETWEEN the Shia—and other religious Lebanese—and the Cedar demonstrations crested with the counterdemonstration, sparked by Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah's televised call for a protest. Shia formed the bulk of the counterdemonstrations: Thousands of women in headscarves and hijabs and bearded men dressed all in black mingled with average Lebanese families. Many had traveled from poor areas of southern Lebanon.

Like the Cedar demonstrators, this crowd also called for a truthful investigation into Hariri's assassination, but their assumption was that the result would clear Syria, not implicate it. "The death of Mr. Hariri is part of an American and Israeli project to change the Middle East," said Ali Sharif, 33, a Shia shopkeeper from Baalbek. "Just like September 11 provided an excuse to invade Iraq, the death of Mr. Hariri is an excuse to weaken Lebanon for Israel." "My problem is not with the Syrians," agreed Mohammed Makbel, 40, a watch salesman. "They are our neighbors. My problem is with America helping Israel redraw the Middle East and divide Lebanon so that they can put the Palestinian refugees here."

The counterdemonstrators also directed their vitriol at the Cedar protestors. "The opposition is using the blood of the prime minister in a disgusting way, by placing the blame on the current leaders," said Hadi Chatila, a graphic designer. "But we are the real voice of democracy in Lebanon. The voice of Lebanon is what we are seeing now." ■

Beirut Dispatch

Mirror Image

BY ANNIA CIEZADLO

TO AMERICANS DESPERATE for good news from abroad, the Beirut Spring is the apotheosis of a Middle Eastern perestroika. To the White House, and many American pundits, the crowds in Martyrs' Square have vindicated the Bush administration's invasion of Iraq. The image of Iraqis voting freely, so the narrative goes, struck a chord in other Arabs that finally gave them the courage to reach for the prize. NPR's Daniel Schorr argued that President Bush "may have had it right" when he said, "A liberated Iraq can show the power of freedom to transform that vital region." Dennis Ross, writing in the *Financial Times*, attributed Lebanon's uprising to the "Iraq effect." *Washington Post* columnist David Ignatius made the same point, citing Lebanese opposition leader Walid Jumblatt, who told Ignatius, "It's strange for me to say it, but this process of change has started because of the American invasion of Iraq. ... When I saw the Iraqi people voting three weeks ago, eight million of them, it was the start of a new Arab world." Jumblatt's quote caromed across the Internet, cropping up on numerous conservative blogs and in other columns. In *The New York Times*, David Brooks quoted Ignatius quoting Jumblatt and concluded, "People around the Arab world look at voters in Iraq and ask, 'Why not here?' "

There's just one problem. The idea that the Lebanese were inspired by the Iraq war doesn't have much currency in Beirut. "I've never heard it from anybody except Walid Jumblatt," laughs Jamil Mroue, editor-in-chief of Beirut's *Daily Star* newspaper. "I've heard the Lebanese say, 'What the heck, are [the Syrians] going to take us back to the Stone Age?' They're saying 'Fuck it, we're not going back. And, if it means demonstrating in the streets, and if it

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means changing the government, then so be it.' But I don't think they thought, 'Oh, the Iraqis voted, so we can, too.' " In actuality, some Lebanese have been struggling for reform for decades, hating their Syrian overlords. "Lebanon has been the only satellite state in the world since the end of the cold war, and no one lifted a finger," says Farid El-Khazen, a political science professor in Beirut. "It was business as usual until 9/11, and U.S.-Syria relations began to deteriorate. Internally, there was a movement all along that pushed for an end to the occupation. ... There is a linkage, if you like, with Iraq, in the sense that American policy has changed toward Syria due to their interference in Iraq. But [the Lebanese opposition] has been going on for a long time."

BECAUSE THE BEIRUT Spring happened so soon after Iraq's election, and just as Hosni Mubarak said he would allow opposition parties to run for office in Egypt, the foreign press has linked the so-called Cedar Revolution to these other events. What has happened in Lebanon, however, is fundamentally different from events in other parts of the Middle East. Unlike other Arab states, Lebanon is not a dictatorship and never has been. It already has a civil society and a democratic infrastructure—the freest press in the region, a long history of relatively free elections, and a tradition of pluralism. D. Roman Kulchitsky, a political science professor at the American University in Beirut (AUB), says, "People here have been experimenting with democracy for a very long time. But there's always been so many external forces getting involved."

Indeed, for years, the United States was complicit in the Syrian occupation of Lebanon. After the 1989 Taif Accord, Syria became the main power broker in Lebanon, an arrangement accepted by the United States in the interests of "regional stability." At the same time, Washington invested relatively little in promoting liberalization in Lebanon: In 2003, the National Endowment for Democracy spent less than $700,000 on democracy promotion there; by comparison, the United States spent nearly $2 million on democracy promotion in the Ukraine. "The Lebanese not having a democracy was partly the American government's decision in supporting the Syrian hegemony over Lebanon," says Mroue.

Even so, Lebanese reformers continued pushing for change. "Lebanon was a democracy; now the issue in Lebanon is sovereignty, because Lebanon was not a country that was ruled by a dictator," says El-Khazen. "We had elections in Lebanon for 100 years. Women in Lebanon voted in 1953. Civil society has always existed in Lebanon ... but no one was listening to what Lebanon was saying—that, if you invest in Lebanon's democracy, the return will be fruitful."

At first, Lebanon's anti-Syria opposition consisted mainly of parties that had lined up against the Syrian regime, or its proxies, during the Lebanese civil war. They began demonstrating off and on in downtown Beirut against the Syrian-backed government in the early '90s, and today, they form the backbone of the ongoing Martyrs' Square sit-ins. Often, the government would retaliate against them, breaking up the demonstrations with soldiers and tanks and sending Syrian intelligence agents to threaten protest leaders. Meanwhile, a parallel civil society movement was developing in Beirut's cafés, newspaper offices, and college campuses. This movement launched a petition drive against government corruption as early as 1994 and followed that up with several other petition campaigns. Civil society leaders even held a campaign in 1997 and 1998 to demand local elections—a campaign they won (elections were held in 1998, the first municipal elections in Lebanon in 35 years). "Many of the guys who worked for these campaigns are now inside the tents in Martyrs' Square," says Samir Kassir, a columnist for the Beirut newspaper *An Nahar*. "What we are seeing now is the result of 15 years of intellectual pressure and groundwork."

Over time, this anti-Syria movement broadened, taking in more Muslim parties, though few Shia. Rafik Hariri, a Sunni Muslim, swung into the anti-Syrian camp when Syria extended the term of Lebanese President Émile Lahoud, a rival of Hariri. And, when Hariri was killed, many Lebanese saw all their carefully cultivated experiments in civil society slipping away, and they chose not to accept that.

AS THE RECENT demonstrations developed, they were inspired not by the Iraqi elections, but by the recent revolutions in Ukraine and Georgia. "If there is a model, they're looking at the Ukrainian model," says Kulchitsky. "The people here want to preserve their democracy, not to create one. And they want to do it in a peaceful way. I don't think that the Iraqi situation carries the model of a peaceful situation." Last November, when the Orange Revolution broke out, Kulchitsky flew to Kiev.

Back at the AUB, he gave a lecture on the Ukraine to his students—including Anthony Letayf. A campus organizer for the Free Patriotic Movement, a longtime anti-Syria group, Letayf had been going to demonstrations against Syrian occupation for years. But nothing ever seemed to change. When Hariri was killed, however, Letayf sensed that something could be different. After the funeral procession, Letayf and other campus organizers—now the moving force behind downtown Beirut's peaceful sit-in—came to Kulchitsky and asked him to advise them on how the Ukrainians had pulled it off. The professor told them to try to emulate the Ukrainian youth: Keep it peaceful, ban drinking and fighting, camp down at the square to keep attention on them.

Letayf, too, is skeptical of the Iraq comparison. "I think that one role that it had played is that it gave the international community some credibility," he says. "Lebanese people, and people in the Arab world in general, don't trust the U.S. to follow through. ... If the elections in Iraq did help, it was because it made people think, 'Maybe they really do want this, maybe they really do mean it this time.' " ■

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Why Democrats oppose Bush.

Personal Dispute

BY N. GREGORY MANKIW

HARVARD UNIVERSITY IS, by some measures, one of the most left-wing institutions on the face of the earth. So you may be surprised to hear that it has endorsed George W. Bush's proposal for Social Security reform. Literally, of course, that is not true. But the retirement plan Harvard has set up for faculty members like me bears a striking resemblance to what the Social Security system would become under the president's proposed changes.

Harvard's retirement plan is essentially the nonprofit sector's version of a 401(k). Each year, the university puts a certain percentage of my income into my retirement account. I then invest this money in low-cost mutual funds, which hold a diversified portfolio of stocks and bonds. I can choose a safer portfolio with a lower expected return or a riskier portfolio with a higher expected return. The money is mine, even if I decide to leave the university. If I die, I can leave it to my kids. When I retire, I can use it to buy an annuity to ensure a stream of income for the rest of my life.

Under Bush's proposal, you would have the option of diverting some of your payroll taxes into a personal retirement account. You would invest this money in low-cost mutual funds, which would hold a diversified portfolio of stocks and bonds. You could choose a safer portfolio with a lower expected return or a riskier portfolio with a higher expected return. The money would be yours, no matter how many times you changed jobs. If you died before collecting any money, you could leave your account to your kids. When you retired, you could use it to buy an annuity to ensure a stream of income for the rest of your life.

Historically, Social Security has been a defined-benefit system. You put money in when you are working, the government promises you an income when you retire, and, in the meantime, the feds take care of everything. Bush is proposing that Social Security gradually evolve into a defined-contribution system, where money is put in your account and then you watch over your own retirement assets.

I am perfectly happy with Harvard's retirement plan. I have the sense that my colleagues at Harvard are happy with it as well, as are millions of other workers who have similar arrangements. This raises the question: If the liberal Harvard faculty is content with the defined-contribution structure for their private retirement income, why are liberals in Congress (and the liberal NEW REPUBLIC, for that matter) so appalled that Bush would propose moving the public retirement system in the same direction?

AS FAR AS I can tell, there are three reasons. The first is that the president proposed it, and some Democrats will oppose anything he advances. Many hope that Social Security reform will do to Republicans what Hillarycare did to Democrats: hand the president a defeat so humiliating that it would undercut his ability to set the domestic policy agenda. It is not hard to imagine that this outcome would affect midterm elections and perhaps even alter the balance of power in Congress.

The second reason the left hates personal accounts is that, over the long term, they could destroy one of its favorite battle cries: the alleged conflict between evil capitalists and oppressed workers. ("Workers of the world unite; you have nothing to lose but your chains.") No ambitious political figure today would be stupid enough to quote Marx, but let's face it, much of the left's rhetoric is a less elegant paraphrase of his worldview.

Social Security reform could put a stake through the heart of this populism once and for all. After workers develop an equity stake in corporate America, they will start watching CNBC and the "Nightly Business Report." Their view of how they relate to the economy will fundamentally change. Bush understands this, and it is one reason he talks about an "ownership society." Democratic leaders understand it as well. Their biggest fear is that a nation of stockholders could easily morph into a nation of Republicans.

The third reason for the left's opposition to personal accounts is simple paternalism. Liberal critics of the Bush plan may be willing to accept that Harvard professors are capable of investing sensibly for their own retirement, but they are not ready to trust the general public to do the same. Compared with Republicans, Democrats are more averse to an economic system in which people play a larger role in taking care of themselves. To be sure, the paternalists raise a valid concern—some segments of the population are not economically sophisticated—but this is not so much an argument against personal accounts as a reason why we need to get the details right. Any reform should include some restrictions to protect people from themselves. There should be limits on how much risk people can take in their portfolios, especially as they approach retirement. There should be requirements that people annuitize enough of their accumulation upon retirement to ensure they are kept

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out of poverty for the rest of their lives.

Of course, when Democrats speak publicly, they are rarely this frank. They will not readily admit to political opportunism, to opposing the spread of stock ownership, or to distrusting the public with its own money. So, instead, they raise two canards—one involving the deficit, the other involving risk.

Opponents of Bush's proposal say that funding personal accounts will require irresponsibly large increases in the budget deficit. This argument, however, is mostly fatuous. For one thing, the president is proposing to phase in the new system gradually. Eventually, everyone would be able to place 4 percent of their wages (up to the maximum of taxable earnings, which today is about $90,000) into a personal account. But, initially, the contribution would be capped at $1,000 per year, precisely to calm fears about the short-run budget impact.

More important, under the president's proposed policy, the long-run impact of personal accounts on the government's finances is approximately zero. When a person signs up for a voluntary personal account, the government puts, say, $1,000 in his or her account. In exchange, that person agrees to receive lower benefits from the traditional defined-benefit system, by an amount equal to $1,000 in present value. The initial payment into the account requires $1,000 in extra government borrowing, but that debt is offset by a reduction in the government's liability to pay future Social Security benefits.

All economists will tell you that the government faces a budget constraint that is expressed in terms of the present value of current and future cash flows. If a worker takes more out of the system today and agrees to take less out in the future—and those two changes balance in present value—then the government's finances are neither better nor worse than they were before. Higher budget deficits in the near term are balanced by smaller deficits or larger surpluses further out. In essence, the establishment of personal accounts recognizes an existing liability rather than creating a new one.

Some economists go so far as to suggest that the borrowing to finance personal accounts is an advantage of the proposed reform. One problem with traditional Social Security is that liabilities are implicit and, therefore, easy to ignore. Politicians have found promising higher benefits too attractive, because the cost of those benefits has been too well-hidden. Indeed, the funding shortfalls now facing Social Security are like those many companies face with defined-benefit pension plans. Recognizing these problems, younger businesses are more likely to set up defined-contribution plans like Harvard's. A defined-contribution system is more transparent—the worker knows what he is getting, and the employer knows what he is paying. Greater transparency should also be a goal for the federal government's finances.

The second canard raised by critics of the president's proposal is the claim that it would leave retirees of the future facing too much risk. They argue that personal accounts would leave the safety net for the elderly with too many holes. The most obvious response is that the proposed personal accounts are voluntary. If you want to stay in a traditional defined-benefit plan, just don't opt in. And, even if you opt in but then want a low-risk retirement income, you can invest in inflation-indexed Treasury bonds.

Most financial planners, however, recommend that everyone invest at least a portion of their retirement resources in equities. Sure, this means higher risk, but the risk is compensated for by a higher possible return. Harvard faculty can decide for themselves how much risk they are willing to bear. Personal accounts in Social Security would expand the number of Americans given this choice.

One important risk that reform could reduce is the uncertainty about future benefits that arises from the vagaries of the political process—a type of risk that does not yield a higher return. Proponents of the current system like to say that it offers a guaranteed retirement benefit. But how guaranteed is that benefit when the system is so vastly underfunded? President Clinton talked about the "fiscal crisis in Social Security" in 1998, but no changes in the system were enacted. (Reliable sources tell me that Clinton's inaction on Social Security was in part a payoff to the left wing of his party for its support during impeachment.) Now, seven years later, Bush is trying to address the problem, but many in Congress want to kick the problem down the road yet again. In light of the political uncertainty, it is preposterous to view the current system as low-risk.

But, if personal accounts are not the irresponsible budget-busters that the left claims, nor are they the free lunch that some on the right seem to believe. The simple demographic facts are that Americans are having fewer children and living longer. As a result, the ratio of workers to retirees has fallen from 16 to one in 1950 to 3.3 to one today, and it is expected to continue to fall. Clearly, in retrospect, it was insane to set up a retirement system with a fixed retirement age (which now is slated to rise very slowly). Imagine if, instead, Franklin Roosevelt had set up a Social Security system in which the youngest 90 percent of the population agreed to support the oldest 10 percent—and those percentages were fixed over time. Such a system would have been better able to withstand changes in demography.

Unfortunately, that is not the system we inherited. The current system has a path of projected revenue and a path of promised benefits that do not line up. It will start running deficits around 2018, and those deficits will grow larger indefinitely. Under current law, when the trust fund runs out around 2042, benefits will be cut automatically by about 25 percent for everyone, including those already retired. At that point, there will be a battle among the gener-

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ations—the outcome of which is anyone's guess. Those interested in semantic games can argue about whether this situation is really a crisis, as Clinton and Bush have called it, or simply a problem. But there is little doubt that the aging of the population has put the federal budget on an unsustainable path, and the sooner we act, the better.

Bush made clear in this year's State of the Union speech that personal accounts by themselves will not solve the funding problem. The solution will have to include some combination of slowing the growth of benefits, increasing the age of eligibility for benefits, or raising taxes. The president has rejected increasing the payroll tax rate, but he has left on the table raising the cap on taxable payroll. I have met no Republicans who like this idea, but it may be the price of convincing a few moderate Senate Democrats to support change.

Some have asked, if personal accounts will not fill the shortfall in Social Security's finances, why talk about them? The answer is that, once major Social Security reform is on the table, we should take the opportunity to improve the system in any way we consider prudent. When you bring your car into the shop for a new muffler, you shouldn't complain if your mechanic points out that your brakes are shot. Once you have brought the car in, you should want to fix all the problems that need fixing.

The same principle holds for public policy. We need to fix Social Security's funding problem, and that will require hard choices. But we should also make it a better system for future generations. Moving the system gradually from defined-benefit to defined-contribution would be a good step, giving people more choices and the government greater transparency. The funding problem is the catalyst for reform, but the nation should take this opportunity to give all Americans a retirement system as reliable as the one Harvard gives its faculty. ■

A principled case for obstruction.

Blocking Move

BY JONATHAN CHAIT

AT A TOWN-HALL meeting last month in Philadelphia, Rick Santorum, the stalwart conservative senator from Pennsylvania, was pitching President Bush's plan to privatize Social Security, speaking the reassuringly nonideological language of insolvency dates and rates of return. It fell to a sympathetic college student in the audience, blessedly unversed in the arts of message discipline, to state what conservatives truly think—and have always thought—about Social Security. "I want to know what problem everybody has with taking care of themselves," she said. At a similar event, College Republicans chanted, "Hey hey, ho ho, Social Security has got to go."

Out of the mouths of babes came a pair of remarkably succinct statements about what is at stake as the Bush administration sets about privatizing Social Security: Should Social Security remain in something like its present form, as a social guarantee to retirees, widows, and disabled workers? Or should it be dismantled and replaced with a system in which everybody takes care of themselves?

What was clarified at those events has, alas, been obscured in Washington. The consensus among the capital's chattering classes holds that the Social Security debate primarily concerns the program's solvency. Therefore, the questions center around political courage, and the greatest threat is that the parties will not agree on a solution. This consensus is wrong in every particular. In truth, the debate is fundamentally ideological. It does not lend itself to compromise. Despite conservatives' insistence that Social Security faces a "crisis," in reality, the fiscal threat is distant and manageable, while the political threat is immediate and dire. It follows from all this that those who believe in Social Security should make it their highest priority to drive a stake through privatization.

TO THE WASHINGTON establishment, the suggestion that conservatives essentially want to do away with Social Security is something close to a lunatic conspiracy theory. When a guest on "Meet the Press" suggested as much, Tim Russert replied incredulously, "So you're suggesting that private personal accounts are a secret plan to get rid of Social Security?"

In fact, the plan hasn't been secret very long. Conservatives always saw the program as an indefensible infringement upon freedom. Alf Landon, the 1936 Republican presidential nominee, called Social Security a "cruel hoax." More than 40 years ago, Milton Friedman wanted to let workers opt out of it, and Barry Goldwater said, "Perhaps Social Security should be abolished." That view, however, has never proved popular. And so conservatives hit upon the tactic of phasing out the program by transforming it into a system of private accounts. Privatization activist Peter Ferrara was quite open about this point in a recent interview with Steven Thomma of Knight-Ridder. "A lot of conservatives thought Social Security was an unjustified invasion into the private sector," he said. "But they weren't getting anywhere, because that was all negative politics. . . . Personal ac-

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counts would work because that's positive politics."

Still, as long as they remained confined to the political fringe, advocates of privatization nonetheless confessed their abiding hostility to Social Security itself. Ferrara's 1980 book *Social Security: The Inherent Contradiction*, which first laid out a privatization plan in detail, asserts that "social security uses simple force and coercion to compel individuals to participate in a program that seizes control of a portion of their incomes."

In 1983, a paper in the *Cato Journal* called for privatization advocates to wage "guerrilla warfare against both the current Social Security system and the coalition that supports it." And a 1998 book by Ferrara and Michael Tanner of the Cato Institute, *A New Deal for Social Security*, concedes its preference to abolish the program. Ferrara and Tanner write, "[I]n an ideal world, each of us would be free to make our own decisions over how to provide for our retirement—how much and when to save."

Today the privatizers have gotten closer to their wish than ever before. Bush has raided the libertarian Cato Institute to stock his staff of Social Security advisers. And he has closely followed the "guerrilla warfare" strategy laid out more than two decades ago by unabashed foes of Social Security. Yet, when the president invokes Franklin Roosevelt, as he does every time he talks about Social Security, it is to praise the New Dealer and his works. In his State of the Union address, Bush called Social Security "one of America's most important institutions, a symbol of the trust between generations" and "a great moral success." Of course, Bush and his allies have not abandoned their fundamental hostility to Social Security. They've merely learned to bury it beneath a pile of disingenuous rhetoric. And that is why Democrats must not be afraid to block the president's plan.

ONE WINDOW INTO Bush's ideological disposition is his constant refrain that private accounts would offer "a better rate of return on your money than that which the Social Security system gets." On a technical level, that's a deeply misleading claim. One reason is a theoretical concept called "legacy debt." Social Security started paying out retirement benefits almost immediately after it came into existence, which meant that the early generations of beneficiaries collected benefits while paying little or nothing into the system. This created the legacy debt. Every subsequent generation, whose taxes support previous generations, must bear a higher tax burden to compensate for the first generation's free ride. That's the cost of the legacy debt, and it's why Social Security will *always* earn a below-market rate of return.

Now, any generation could decide to stop paying into the system and keep their contributions in private accounts for their own retirement. These private accounts would appear to earn a higher rate of return going forward—but only if you ignore the cost of trillions of dollars that must then be borrowed to pay off current Social Security obligations. When these transition costs are factored in, private accounts don't earn a market rate of return either.

On a deeper level, though, Bush's line of reasoning is illuminative. Privatizers portray Social Security as a kind of low-performing 401(k) plan. But the program was never intended as a personal retirement plan. It's a form of social insurance, designed to spread risks throughout the population. One such risk is that you get sick or hurt and can't work anymore; 11.5 percent of Social Security benefits go to disabled workers (which is another reason why retirees get a lower rate of return).

Another risk is that your income will decline, perhaps because economic changes make your skills less valuable. (Today, for example, steelworkers could be made redundant by productivity increases. Perhaps in 30 years it will be accountants or software engineers whose work was outsourced overseas.) That's why Social Security gives low-earning retirees a greater return on their taxes than high-income retirees. Still another risk is that you'll live a very long time and exhaust your savings, which is why old-age benefits are indexed to inflation and last for a lifetime.

A system of individual accounts would concentrate all these risks on the shoulders of the individual. The inherent risks of investing have captured the most attention. Obviously, if you invest poorly—or even retire at the end of a market slump—you may get a nasty surprise at retirement. (Gary Burtless of the Brookings Institution studied what would have happened historically if workers had invested two percentage points of their Social Security taxes in stocks. Those retiring at the end of a slump would have less than half the income of their more fortunate counterparts who cashed in a few years earlier.) But the risks of replacing social insurance pose an even harsher dilemma. If you suffer a career-ending disability before you've put aside enough in your account, if you find yourself at the low end of the income scale, or if you live longer than you had made contingencies for, you would be out of luck. Social Security doesn't make anybody a millionaire, but it offers everyone the assurance against suffering too much from outrageous fortune. A privatized system would invert that premise.

Privatization advocates insist that the changing economy has rendered social insurance obsolete. "The economy is changing, the world is changing," asserted Bush during last year's campaign. "In our parents' generation, moms usually stayed home while fathers worked for one company until retirement. The company provided health care and training and a pension."

Bush is right about the changes. As Yale political scientist Jacob S. Hacker has noted, this generation of workers faces much greater income variability than the previous generation. Rather than slow, steady pay increases and lifetime employment, workers change jobs and see their incomes fluctuate dramatically. One of the most potent changes has come in company pensions. Forty years ago, most pensions gave workers a fixed benefit. Today, most pension benefits are tied, at least in part, to stock-market performance.

But Bush has the implications of this change exactly

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backward. Because workers face higher risk in the economy today, social insurance that eliminates risk makes *more* sense, not less. Privatized Social Security might have made some sense 40 years ago for workers who stayed at one company their whole career and retired to a guaranteed pension. Why not let them take some risks with their public pension? But it utterly fails to meet the needs of the present day. The last thing you want is for your 401(k) and your Social Security to drop simultaneously during a market decline shortly before you retire. If workers are going to take on greater risk in a more dynamic economy, a risk-free bedrock of social insurance offers the perfect complement.

TO THIS, BUSH'S allies would no doubt reply that they only intend to privatize the system in part. They would leave a minimum guaranteed benefit in place, along with survivors' benefits. What they rarely acknowledge is that partial privatization is designed to lead to full privatization.

Bush, in a rare moment of wandering off-message, actually admitted this once. Shortly after announcing his support for private accounts in 2000, he was asked about transitioning to a fully private system at a question-and-answer session, and he replied, "It's going to take a while to transition to a system where personal savings accounts are the predominant part of the investment vehicle. ... This is a step toward a completely different world, and an important step."

How will this work? Conservatives believe, not without reason, that private accounts will offer an invidious comparison to traditional Social Security. Workers will note that the taxes they send off to the traditional program disappear, while the money in their own accounts grows before their eyes. The private accounts will, in most cases, also appear to provide a higher rate of return. As noted above, the comparison is deceptive—traditional Social Security will be bearing the weight of the legacy debt, disability benefits, and, for affluent workers, redistribution to those earning less. But the comparison will create a constituency clamoring for expansion. Conservatives once proclaimed this unabashedly. The 1983 *Cato Journal* paper, which advocated what it called a "Leninist Strategy" for undermining Social Security, argued, "This mechanism for demonstrating the individual gains and losses that occur under Social Security is a key step in weakening public support for our present system."

Today's privatizers offer assurances that private accounts will be strictly limited and regulated. But those promises can't easily be reconciled with one of their key selling points—namely that workers would own them. "Under a privatized Social Security system, workers would have full property rights in their retirement accounts," writes Cato's Tanner. "They would own the money in them, the same way people own their IRA's or 401(k) plans." The comparison with IRAs and 401(k) accounts is instructive. These, like the proposed Social Security accounts, were created for the very narrow purpose of retirement savings. But their owners saw them as their own property and demanded the right to use them for children's educations, buying homes, and other purposes. Congress has steadily acceded to those demands, and the Bush administration has already proposed expanding IRAs into all-purpose tax shelters with even fewer restrictions.

As conservatives well understand, once a group of voters has been given a property right by Washington, they will never allow it to be taken away. The individual rights will be a ratchet, one that can be expanded but never contracted. The pressure for expansion would be especially strong during extended bull market runs, such as during the late '90s, when the public (and even some economists) tends to delude itself into thinking that stocks will rise forever. This is why conservatives are so insistent upon establishing individual accounts. They have uncharacteristically volunteered compromises—even offering to violate their theological opposition to tax hikes—in order to insert their opening wedge. Privatizers understand full well that any concessions they make can be legislated away in the future, while private accounts cannot.

IN LIGHT OF all this, it should be clear how critical it is to block private accounts. And it's curious, if not outright bizarre, that so many of those who do not share the privatizers' basic hostility to Social Security nonetheless urge the Democrats to compromise with them. Suppose a group of peaceniks, concluding that their long quest to slash defense spending has failed, decided to overhaul the Pentagon. They have the explicit goal of transforming the military into a shriveled force incapable of projecting power overseas, but they sell their plan as a solution to wasteful defense procurement. Of course, they wouldn't receive a serious hearing, just as Social Security privatization didn't two decades ago. But imagine that they patiently advocated their case, and, in due time, very liberal Democrats came to control the White House and Congress and put their brand of military "reform" on the national agenda. Would moderate conservatives feel the need to strike a deal? Would their failure to do so reflect a shameful lack of response to the (very real) problem of Pentagon waste? Probably—hopefully—not.

Why, then, is privatizing Social Security widely seen not as a contest of diametrical philosophies but as fertile ground for compromise? (As Joe Lieberman said on CNN last Sunday, "So, at some point, we've got to stop criticizing each other and sit at the table and work out this problem.") One reason is that the culture of Washington celebrates consensus. Refusing to compromise is considered unseemly. Republicans have played to this sentiment by accusing Democrats of opposing Bush merely for the sake of denying him a victory. The press has proved receptive to this line of attack. "So the Democratic position," PBS anchorman Jim Lehrer asked Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid last month, "is that there is no crisis and nothing needs to be done at all to the Social Security program right now?"

Republicans like to point out that none other than Bill Clinton called Social Security's financing a "crisis" in the late '90s. Indeed, it seemed that way at the time. But it has

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become less and less clear that Social Security actually will become insolvent. In 1997, the Social Security actuaries projected that the Trust Fund would run out in 2027. But every year since, even after the economic slowdown of 2001, faster growth has pushed that date back. Today, the actuaries project the Trust Fund will run out in 2042. It's now within the realm of possibility that the date of insolvency will be pushed back indefinitely. Quite possibly, in other words, little or nothing will need to be done to save Social Security. More likely, the benefit cuts or tax hikes required to keep it in the black will be less severe than currently projected.

CUTTING THE GUARANTEED benefit is the politically dicey part of reforming Social Security, and privatizers argue that establishing individual accounts will make such cuts easier. As an administration Social Security strategist put it, "You've got the bitter medicine of changing the indexing [which will reduce benefits], but, to go along with that, you've got the sweetener of the accounts." But, in reality, individual accounts make benefit reductions more painful by forcing deeper cuts than would otherwise be necessary. And, of course, the deeper the cut, the harder it is to enact.

Given that his own supposed solution will make it harder to shore up Social Security, Bush's claims to be motivated by a desire to save the program are patently disingenuous. Bush has argued that the true Social Security crisis will occur not when the Trust Fund runs out in 2042, but in 2018, when Social Security benefits outstrip tax revenues, forcing the program to cash in its Treasury bonds. What emergency will happen in 2018? The federal government will have to run deficits. But, of course, the government is already running large deficits right now, and Bush hardly regards that as a "crisis." If Bush wanted to control entitlement spending, he'd look to save Medicare, whose long-term deficit is seven times that of Social Security.

The only way to make sense of Bush's behavior is to understand that his professed concern for Social Security's solvency is a pretext. He wants to use this moment of maximal Republican power to put his ideological imprint on any change to the system. From a fiscal standpoint, repairing Social Security now as opposed to five or ten years from now makes almost no difference. The true basis for Bush's urgency is that Republicans may not control Washington in five or ten years. For ideological conservatives, this is a pressing reason to act now. For the rest of us, it isn't.

Bush has tried to pressure Democrats by accusing them of putting their heads in the sand by not putting forth a detailed plan to save Social Security. Amazingly, mainstream pundits have endlessly repeated this vacuous talking point, seemingly oblivious to the fact that Bush has no detailed plan, either. Bush has put forth some general principles. Democrats have also put forth general principles. (In a press conference, Democratic leaders indicated their preference for a bipartisan solution, mixing benefit cuts and tax hikes, similar to what a commission chaired by Alan Greenspan produced two decades ago.) Sure, Bush has focused more on the need for change and Democrats on the dangers of the wrong kind of change. But that's because Bush can be sure any plan that passes soon will meet his approval. Democrats, obviously, have no such confidence.

Bush and his allies have accused Democrats of opposing his agenda out of pure partisan interest. They have also warned that the public will blame Democrats if they block reform. Both these arguments happen to be wrong. Not only are there sound, substantive reasons for defeating privatization, polls show around 70 percent of the public opposes replacing part of a guaranteed benefit with an individual account. The minority party will not be blamed for failing to implement wildly unpopular changes.

The fear peddled by the administration that fiscal calamity will ensue if we do nothing is also groundless. What's so bad about waiting until the last minute? In 1983, Congress waited until the very eve of insolvency to act, and a very responsible bipartisan solution emerged. If we do nothing until 2042, and insolvency actually does loom then, the same thing would no doubt happen again.

There are other principled reasons for postponing a Social Security fix. Waiting too long may not be ideal, but acting too soon carries its own risks. Long-term projections are highly unreliable. The further in advance of the problem we act, the less reliable our guess. Also, acting now to "save" Social Security would consume scarce resources that may be needed to solve larger problems. Some moderates have suggested cutting a Social Security deal that includes a tax hike. But balancing the general operating budget and saving Medicare and Medicaid will probably require tax hikes, too. These twin problems—the deficit and health care—dwarf Social Security's future insolvency. Pouring resources into saving Social Security now is like driving a fire truck past the blazing inferno to fireproof the house across town.

Some liberals are naturally attracted to the prospect of offering subsidized savings accounts to help workers who have never had the chance to save money and build wealth. It's an attractive goal. (Though whether it's a compelling use of public funds given our desperate fiscal straits is open to dispute.) The key obstacle is that Bush supports those accounts only as a bludgeon against Social Security. If a given bill doesn't sow the seeds of the program's demise, Bush almost certainly won't sign it.

Likewise, he will have little incentive to sign a bill that merely eliminated the program's future deficit, because doing so would deprive him of his strongest pretext for privatization. The key point Democrats should understand is that, while it may be tactically useful to favor an alternative to privatization, no decent alternative is going to be signed into law under this president. There will be plenty of time in the future for shoring up Social Security or adding spiffy new savings vehicles. In the meantime, the crown jewel of the New Deal faces an existential threat. Defeating that threat is the task to which we must presently address ourselves. ■

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BOOKS & THE ARTS

STANLEY KAUFFMANN ON FILMS

Different Weights

SOME YEARS AGO I SPENT A weekend in Las Vegas and enjoyed it. The bounteous vulgarity in every possible way, from displays to entertainments to phalanxes of slot machines, seemed to me exactly what it ought to be. Anything more chaste and sensible would have been out of order, a disappointment.

I watch the Oscars every year, and I have more or less the same reaction: that everything is in character. And every year, regular as a sort of intellectual clockwork, knowledgeable critics are ready to scorn: to disclose the industrial ogre beneath the artistic hoopla, to rip open the pretensions, to excoriate the lengthy and unexciting familial tributes and embraces. Each year I wonder what these critics expected. A coronation by the Muses on the slopes of Olympus, perhaps?

THE 77TH ANNUAL ACADEMY AWARDS

WALK ON WATER (Samuel Goldwyn Films)

The super-lavish hall where the Oscars now take place, the unsurpassable grossness of the settings and the stage machinery—well, of course. Who would want anything Doric? The Oscars are out to supply once a year what ornate movie palaces of the past used to give viewers every week. The prizewinners are not worth discussing as artistic decisions: they are what an industry wants for its industrial well-being. Some people are still roiled by the injustice and neglect trumpeted by most of those prizes, but can they have thought that the film world would spend copious time and money to blazon worthy films, independent or not, that may have disappeared months ago?

I'm not suggesting the easing of critical rigor about the Oscars: I'm proposing a sense of the ridiculous. Our own taste and minds ought not to occlude what this bejeweled trade show is for. To judge it by the best standards at our command would be to debase those standards. For the most part, the Oscar broadcast is a glitzy attempt to attract and please the largest segment of the film audience. In this latest broadcast the only item that really bothered me was the appearance of the admirable Yo-Yo Ma, playing some Bach as background to one of the program numbers. Will the Yankees engage Pierre Boulez to conduct the band for the opening game of next season, just to class things up?

Ladies' gowns for Oscar night always get a good deal of notice, and some of them are indeed breathtaking. (Once again, my heart goes out to the designers of the gowns worn by nonwinners: no adequate display of their work.) But insufficient attention is paid to male dress. Many of the men clearly strain to wear something other than the usual white-tie or black-tie formal outfit. The host, Chris Rock, had the formal jacket and trousers but showed his daring by wearing an everyday shirt and cravat. Jeremy Irons, trying hard not to look forlorn at his appearance as a presenter, wore a kind of fantasy based on white tie and tails. But the radical winner, hands down, was Sean Penn, who came out to present one of the Oscars wearing an ordinary jacket and slacks and no tie at all. *No tie at all!* You had to marvel at the man's sheer guts, his brave dismissal of convention, his declaration of self.

Once in a while the Oscar ceremony includes something that paradoxically doesn't quite jibe with the ballyhoo and yet ameliorates it. This year it was the tribute to Sidney Lumet. His long career, like any long career, has had surges and sags, but there have been very few sags in intent, in serious ambition. I have been watching him since before the beginning of that career: I saw him play the boy Jesus in Maxwell Anderson's *Journey to Jerusalem* on Broadway in 1940. To film direction he brought from the first a fervor of purpose and the beginner's itch to prove his mastery of the medium. About one early work, for instance, *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, I can wish he had made it much later, when he didn't feel the need to prove filmic virtuosity. He certainly achieved that virtuosity, intelligently selective yet rich. *Dog Day Afternoon* and *The Verdict* are two of the best American films made during his active lifetime. It was good to see him up on that garish stage expressing his thanks simply.

Well, on to the seventy-eighth Oscar night. Meanwhile, those critics who see so piercingly through the flimflam of the occasion can warm up for next year by attacking the commercialization of Christmas.

All political thrillers, good or less good, have moral implications. The lesser films disregard them or use them only as plot zingers. An Israeli thriller, **WALK ON WATER**, one of the better ones, has grave moral implications and does not ignore them or merely utilize them.

In this screenplay by Gal Uchovsky, which takes place today, Eyal, a hardened and expert agent of Mossad, is ordered to find and to eliminate a surviving German general who was responsible for a number of deaths during the Holocaust. Eyal's chief, Menachem, knows that the German is very old but does not take age as exculpation. Eyal is assigned to go to Germany, find the man, and take necessary steps.

In the opening scene we have seen Eyal at work. On board a Turkish ship approaching a Turkish port, he neatly and swiftly takes care of an enemy agent in front of that man's wife and child. No concession to sentiment here, which, I suppose, mirrors the other man's attitude about the things he had done. Thus from the start we see that the action is going to take place outside the restraints of ordinary regard. An official ethics replaces the usual sort; though, to make the shift more trenchant, Eyal is seen to be more than a robotic serf.

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A thriller made by Israelis that begins with a murder by an Israeli agent and is headed toward another, that deals with justice in its own eyes and revenge on its own scale, must be aware of the careful footing it needs along the way. Complicate matters further by the fact that Eyal becomes friends with an attractive young German woman and her gay brother, both of whom are connected with the object of Eyal's mission. The moral platter is full. *Walk on Water* has a moment literally on the shore of Galilee, but the title is figurative for the whole film.

The director was the experienced Eytan Fox, who was born in New York and grew up in Israel. Both provenances are part of his being. He is thoroughly an Israeli in insight and outlook, but (like other foreign directors of thrillers) his filmic inheritance is American—keen, lean, assumptive of the viewer's agreement with his synoptic method. The same could be said of Lior Ashkenazi, the popular Israeli actor who plays Eyal. In temperament, in essence, he is Humphrey Bogart in Israel today. This is to imply not imitation but innate qualities and the tending of them.

The film's "solution" of its moral complications is in an epilogue that takes place two years after the plot's finish. Everybody, film-makers and us, can go home assuaged—maybe more than that. ■

Jonathan Lear
Whatever

ON BULLSHIT
By Harry G. Frankfurt
(Princeton University Press, 67 pp., $9.95)

WHEN I WAS A GRADuate student at the Rockefeller University, Harry Frankfurt, who was then a professor there, came up to me one day and announced that he had devised the following principle: people naturally gravitate toward the study of that which does not come naturally to them. Thus people who work on ethics typically find it difficult to be good, logicians tend to be muddle-headed, and so on. And he had an explanation for his principle. It is precisely because the impulse to do a good deed seems so odd to a person, Frankfurt claimed, that he finds it fascinating. "Why would anybody in their right mind want to share? Hey, I think I'll write a book about it!" Though he believed that the principle had universal validity, he claimed to have derived it by reflection on a single case: a person who worked on the theory of responsibility.

Frankfurt's principle has since become legendary in philosophy circles. If it is true, then Frankfurt is someone to whom bullshit does not come easily. For while it may be an exaggeration—bullshit?—to say that he has devoted an entire book to the subject—this volume is an old essay that has been re-published as a very short book—he has found the phenomenon worthy of reflection. This is how he begins:

> One of the most salient features of our culture is that there is so much bullshit. Everyone knows this. Each of us contributes his share. But we tend to take the situation for granted. Most people are rather confident of their ability to recognize bullshit and to avoid being taken in by it. So the phenomenon has not aroused much deliberate concern, nor attracted much sustained inquiry.
>
> In consequence, we have no clear understanding of what bullshit is, why there is so much of it, or what functions it serves. And we lack a conscientiously developed appreciation of what it means to us. In other words, we have no theory.

Frankfurt's theory is easy to state. Both the truth-teller and the liar have it in common that they care about the truth. The person who aims at the truth tries to figure out what the world is like and to communicate that to others; the liar attempts to deceive. But by his very attempt to mislead others, the liar betrays his own concern, however perverse, with how things are. As Frankfurt puts it, the truth-teller and the liar are playing opposite sides of the same game.

The bullshitter is in a different game altogether. He simply does not care about the truth or falsity of what he is saying. "The essence of bullshit is not that it is *false* but that it is *phony*." Consider this classic from ancient history: "I didn't inhale." I think the utterance was true, but it was bullshit nonetheless. If it had been false, the utterer would have said the same thing. For this reason, those who do not believe the statement also do not get to the heart of the matter when they say that the speaker is lying. In both cases, if what he said was true and if what he said was false, the president was bullshitting—for in neither case would the truth or the falsity of what he was saying have mattered to him. Frankfurt is correct to insist that it is a "fundamental aspect of the essential nature of bullshit" that "although it is produced without concern with the truth, it need not be false. The bullshitter is faking things. But this does not mean that he necessarily gets them wrong."

Actually, on Frankfurt's account, the bullshitter does turn out to be a liar after all—but at the meta-level. He needs to mask his own indifference. The bullshitter need not deceive us about the facts, but "what he does necessarily attempt to deceive us about is his enterprise." As Frankfurt explains, "The fact about himself that the bullshitter hides ... is that the truth-values of his statements are of no central interest to him; what we are not to understand is that his intention is neither to report the truth nor to conceal it."

Consider, in this context, the recent Democratic campaign for president. Whatever else one might say about Howard Dean, Richard Gephardt, and Joseph Lieberman, they each had clear and sincere views about how to go forward. One was for the war in Iraq, another was against it; one wanted to protect the unions; another wanted to try out school vouchers. The early and tightly spaced primaries served to eliminate them all. The candidate who emerged was someone whose actual views no one could figure

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out, but at every stage—whether the task was to fix things, or to do things right, or to stay until we get the job done, or to bring our boys home, or not to let "them" get away with it again—his opaque claims were made with apparent sincerity and real indignation. Precisely because the candidate did want to win, he had to look as though he cared about the truth of what he was saying. And with all the post-election hand-wringing about why John Kerry lost, one overwhelmingly plausible explanation was overlooked: Kerry was not very good at bullshitting.

ON THE SUBJECT OF SPEAKing one's mind, the current commotion at Harvard has already been analyzed from every angle, except that of the theory of bullshit. From this angle, the problem begins not with the actual content of Lawrence Summers's speculation about the incidence of women in mathematics and the sciences, but with his claim that it represented "my best guess." There's the bullshit. Those three little words indicate that—at least at the time of utterance—the issue did not really matter that much to him.

If the issue were something that, say, put the American economy at risk, would Summers be satisfied with the same amount of research as the basis for his best guess? This fits very well with Frankfurt's diagnosis of one of the prevalent sources of bullshit:

> Bullshit is unavoidable whenever circumstances require someone to talk without knowing what he is talking about. Thus the production of bullshit is stimulated whenever a person's obligations or opportunities to speak about some topic exceed his knowledge of the facts that are relevant to the topic. This discrepancy is common in public life, where people are frequently impelled—whether by their own propensities or by the demands of others—to speak extensively about matters of which they are to some degree ignorant.

But Frankfurt does not prepare us for what comes next, for the dialectic of bullshit. Having gotten into trouble, what is the president of Harvard to do: admit that at the time of speaking he was, if you'll pardon the expression, shooting from the hip? That would be to admit that such a serious subject had not really mattered to him. So what does he do instead? He calls Bill Clinton! *The New York Times* reports that Summers consulted Clinton and the "political counselor" David Gergen to help him with "damage control." The *Times* seemed willing to go along for the ride: "He is reading tomes about leadership. He also recently took his children to see *Hitch*, a new movie, as it happens, about men who are trying to improve their social skills. At the age of 50, Lawrence H. Summers ... finds himself trying to become a new kind of man." Deep in the article Gergen tells us that "it's a good thing when a male demonstrates vulnerability." Note that the issue here is not whether the male *is* vulnerable; it is whether he gives the appearance of being vulnerable. This is a page straight out of the Clinton playbook. After a politically correct mea culpa, we can all move on. It would be unfortunate if Summers's "journey" goes from politically incorrect bullshit to politically correct bullshit.

But the richest moment came when Gergen said of Summers, "He takes a very Socratic approach." Anyone who has spent more than fifteen minutes with a Platonic dialogue would know that Summers looks much more like one of Socrates's interlocutors: a brash, honor-loving person like Thrasymachus who is willing to put forward an idea that he hasn't really thought through. Socrates is the one who exposes the pretense. But of course the truth of the analogy does not matter to Gergen; he is un-Socratically concerned with the creation of an image. In order to succeed, he at least must go through the motions of appearing sincere. Polite society calls this "damage control."

ALL THIS RAISES THE QUESTION: is bullshitting bad? And, if so, why? We already have a fairly clear grasp of the moral worth of truth-telling and lying. In general, truth is good, lying is bad; for we value knowing what the world is like, and we value sincere relationships. We are offended when others try to dislodge us from reality. Yet we also recognize important exceptions: truth-telling can be used in order to embarrass others or in the service of other forms of cruelty; lying can be used compassionately to protect another person's privacy. But what is the moral valence of bullshitting? Obviously, if the bullshitter is also not telling the truth, there are all the familiar problems with being misled. But, as Frankfurt points out, a bullshitter can be telling the truth and believe that he is telling the truth. "The bullshitter may not deceive us, or even intend to do so, either about the facts or what he takes the facts to be." All that matters, on the Frankfurt analysis, is that the bullshitter does not really care about the truth that he is speaking—and that he hides that fact about himself. But why should the fact that he doesn't care matter to us? I don't think Frankfurt can answer this question, because he does not take his analysis of bullshit deep enough.

It is unusual for the author of a newly published book to express anything less than delight with it. "When I reread it recently," Frankfurt told the *Times*, "I was sort of disappointed. It wasn't as good as I'd thought it was. It was a fairly superficial and incomplete treatment of the subject." This is not bullshit. And though Frankfurt's discussion is everywhere illuminating, I think he misunderstands the crucially important concept of the bullshit artist.

Go back in your visual imagination to the image of Bill Clinton biting his lower lip. We do a disservice to his mastery if we think this is just a phony attempt to appear sincere. That would be ordinary bullshit. What takes Clinton to another level, I think, is that he expects us to recognize his gesture as bullshit *and* he expects to get away with it precisely because we do. His openness about his own bullshit is meant to be endearing. This is a level of bullshit that Frankfurt's analysis cannot account for. Indeed, it runs counter to Frankfurt's thesis that the bullshitter must hide his indifference.

The run-of-the-mill bullshitter goes through the motions of hiding his indifference to the truth or the falsity of what he is saying, but the bullshit artist revels in the fact that he can put his indifference on display. Since nothing is hidden—the bullshit has in effect been declared to be bullshit—the only thing that can sustain it is the bullshit itself. I am surprised that Frankfurt overlooked this phenomenon, since instances of it are not all that difficult to find in the academic world. Frankfurt reports that he originally wrote this essay to present at a humanities center. It begs credulity to think he was not trying to confront his colleagues with an exercise in collective self-criticism. But he seems to have blinked at the crucial moment.

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THIS IS ALL THE MORE SURprising since Frankfurt gets right to the nub of the problem: "The contemporary proliferation of bullshit ... has deeper sources, in various forms of skepticism which deny that we can have any reliable access to an objective reality, and which therefore reject the possibility of knowing how things really are." Actually, skepticism is not the same thing as bullshit. There are genuine and deep ways of wondering about the reality and the possibility of objective truth. Skepticism can be an honorable calling. But in the contemporary world it often degenerates into a received attitude, a hip pose, a rhetorical ploy, a kind of academic party trick. Imagine such a skeptic coming to the humanities center: what kind of paper is he or she going to give? An earnest argument that there really is no such thing as truth? Of course not. Such a paper would lack "irony," which is these days the great validator of intellectual authority. (I put "irony" in scare quotes because the current version has almost nothing in common with real irony.) So the paper will inevitably be an "ironic" performance that the truth simply does not matter to the speaker. This is not skepticism, it is bad theater. And the point that the "ironists" are making is that in their bullshit-artistry they can get away with it. (It is not unusual for such speakers to draw attention to the fact that they have actually been paid to come and spread their bullshit.)

In this way, the bullshit artist raises a host of ethical problems that do not arise at the level of ordinary bullshit. For bullshit artistry demands our complicity. It is, in its own way, a demonstration of power. The bullshit artist in effect says, "This is bullshit, but you will accept it anyway. You may accept it as bullshit, but you will honor it anyway." In this respect, the bullshit artist is a knight of decadence. Frankfurt ignores this example; indeed, his analysis of bullshit rules it out as impossible. And in this way he fails to confront the most interesting—and influential—style of bullshit in our time.

But the problem is even worse. For once we recognize that the bullshit artist flaunts his indifference, we have reason to go back to the ordinary bullshitter and ask whether it really is true, as Frankfurt asserts, that he must hide it. Think of Gergen's claim that Summers reminds him of Socrates. I think that any intelligent reader would see through the claim at once. This is not artistry, this is spin. So I think that Frankfurt is wrong even about ordinary bullshit. It may be true that the ordinary bullshitter needs to go through the motions of pretending that the truth of what he says matters to him—but this itself is bullshit, and it may be easily recognizable as such to us all. In this way we are all drawn into a complacent and rundown theatricality. We all know that what we are reading is spin; we all know that the person quoted is not really committed to the truth of what he is saying; and yet we are all somehow willing to go along with what we instantly recognize to be ersatz news. This is the problem with bullshit: it is contagious. It invites us all to grow more detached from the real, to give up caring about what is true and what is false. ■

Paula Fredriksen
Beautiful People

THE INVENTION OF RACISM IN CLASSICAL ANTIQUITY
By Benjamin Isaac
(Princeton University Press, 592 pp., $45)

FREEDOM, DEMOCRACY, PHILosophy; art, education, law. Many of the ideas and ideals that define our culture and what we most value in it trace back across millennia to the civilizations of Greece and Rome. These two ancient societies constituted a fundamental stage in the historical development of the West. Later, refracted through medieval institutions, reclaimed in the Renaissance, and re-appropriated in the Enlightenment, this classical patrimony continued to exercise a decisive influence in shaping the culture and the politics of Europe.

But a shadow side accompanied this amazing heritage. Greek and Roman writers also conceived, developed, and rationalized systems of thought that denied full humanity to other human beings. Bigotry and social hatred, aimed at outsiders beyond the borders of empire and at immigrant communities within, both marked and marred ancient literature. This is the dark theme that compels the rich research of Benjamin Isaac in his important book.

Scrutinizing a huge array of classical sources in an eight-hundred-year arc from the fifth century B.C.E. to the fourth century C.E., Isaac lays open their expressions of ethnic prejudice and xenophobia. How, he asks, did these ideas develop as patterns of thinking, as attitudes of mind? What relation did these ideas have to Greek and, later, to Roman ideologies of imperial expansion? And what contributions did these ideas, passing from antiquity to modernity through the paradoxical conduit of Enlightenment thinkers—Hume, Voltaire, and Kant, among others—bring to the development of modern racism?

GREEK CULTURE, IN ITS LONG history, had two formative encounters with foreign peoples before its hegemony finally ceded to Rome's. The first encounter, in the early fifth century B.C.E., was with Persia. The westward thrust of this imperial power out of Asia precipitated the formation of military alliances between the perennially fractious Greek city-states; in the end they cooperated and successfully resisted conquest. The second encounter occurred about a century and a half later. This time the aggression went in the opposite direction: under Alexander the Great, a military power identified with Greek culture confronted the Persian Empire and prevailed.

The Persians had controlled a vast multi-ethnic empire that included Egypt, the Near East, and what corresponds to modern-day Iraq (ancient Babylonia) and Iran (the Persian heartland). Alexander pushed yet farther east, into the territory of what is now Afghanistan and Pakistan. Through military and diplomatic prowess, he ruled it all. But the political unity of this huge area lasted only as long as its master. When Alexan-

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der died in 323 B.C.E., his empire splintered into smaller kingdoms and city-states. Yet an underlying cultural unity endured.

Wherever Alexander conquered, he established cities and left behind colonizing populations. Forms of urban government, and thus of Greek religion; such organs of post-classical civic culture as the agora, the gymnasium, the library, the theater or amphitheater or hippodrome: these "old country" institutions spread an exported form of Greek civilization, enabling the growth of a new international culture, which scholars call "Hellenism." Hellenism was always a hybrid phenomenon, a creolization of local customs and cultures with the dominant element of Greek. (Artifacts from the Ptolemaic kingdom, for example, though recognizably Hellenistic, are also unmistakably Egyptian.) Greek itself became antiquity's English, the universal linguistic medium that facilitated trade and travel, the exchange of both goods and ideas, the workings of government and of diplomacy, across this vast expanse that stretched from the eastern Mediterranean to the edges of India. In brief, Hellenism was the West's first great experience of globalization.

Culture, art, trade: these descriptive abstractions mask a homelier reality. War and its aftermath, peace, bring different, distant peoples closer. The contact with other cultures achieved initially through military conquest (Alexander's, that of his political heirs, eventually Rome's) brought disempowerment, deportation, and dislocation to the losing side. Defeated peoples might remain where they were, cooperating and accommodating themselves to the new order. Or they might move, becoming refugees, exiles, or slaves. But these empires also established domestic peace, which enabled and encouraged interior travel and less traumatic forms of migration. Merchants, enticed by the wider horizons and the increased opportunities for trade brought by empire, could travel in safety, and so could pilgrims, who celebrated festivals and journeyed to famous temples and holy sites. Populations mixed as soldiers married and they and their families garrisoned military colonies in frontier areas. Ancient empire not only spread the unifying global culture of Hellenism abroad. It also facilitated the migration and mingling of various peoples, bringing foreigners, as immigrants, "home."

How did Greeks, in both these experiences of foreign contact, regard non-Greeks? According to a scholarly tradition that traces back to the Enlightenment, those who fought in the Persian Wars regarded that struggle as a contest between Western democracy and Oriental despotism. For Herodotus and his generation, these modern historians assert, the war against Persia was no mere military encounter, but a *Kulturkampf* of the deepest spiritual and historical significance, recognized as such by the combatants. By repelling Darius and Xerxes, opines one scholar, the Greeks resisted gradual "orientalisation ... coupled with spiritual slavery and the rule of priests." "It was the contact and collision of two different types of civilization," writes another, "of peoples of two different characters ... this contest between the slavery of the barbarian and the liberty of the Greek, between Oriental autocracy and Hellenic constitutionalism." "In depicting the heroic effort of the Greek complex to save itself," declaims Volume Five of the 1927 *Cambridge Ancient History*, Herodotus likewise described the heroic saving of "Europe, as yet unborn for freedom, for science, for civilization."

But as Isaac's scrupulous interrogation of the evidence makes clear, Herodotus and his compatriots experienced contemporary events with no such stirring and morally polarizing clarity. True, they saw in Persia a powerful monarchy and the threat of foreign domination. But they nowhere state that the Persians as a people, because ruled by a monarch, were therefore culturally or morally inferior to the Greeks; nor do they describe these wars as a struggle of freedom-loving Westerners against decadent, barbarian Asiatics. These opinions are indeed to be found in the literature of Western antiquity (as well as in the publications of the modern academy), but not until the fourth century, once Greeks looked at Persians from a more belligerent, expansionist perspective.

The more aggressive Greek military ambitions became, the more disparaging grew their views of targeted Eastern neighbors. Thus, writing circa 380 B.C.E., Isocrates urged that "it is impossible for people raised and governed as they [the Persians] are to have any virtue.... How could there exist a competent commander or a courageous soldier with the habits of these people?... They indulge their bodies in the luxury of their riches. They have souls humiliated and terrified by the monarchy." Greeks, he recounted, are hard, disciplined, masculine, strong, free. Easterners *par contre* are soft, corrupt, effeminate, weak, and servile. What produced such inferior people? Persian government, Isocrates explained, and Persian social relations. (Greek government and society, accordingly, produced intrinsically superior people.) Various vase paintings visually broadcast the same message. In one particularly striking example, a heroically nude Greek prepares to sexually assault a terrified Persian. The Greek runs at the Persian, grasping his own erect penis in his right hand like a sword. The Persian presents his buttocks, while the caption reads, "I stand bent over." The painting refers to an Athenian victory in 465 B.C.E.; the imagery portrays the enemy as effete, impotent, feminized. Translated more colloquially, the message is: "We've really buggered the Persians." Given Persian culture, Greek victory was "natural," as natural as the dominance of male over female.

In their Hellenistic phase, Greeks encountered myriad other ethnicities as they took over the old Persian Empire. Syrians and Phoenicians, Egyptians and Jews, among others, became the subject of Hellenistic ethnographies. Such writings often ascribed demeaning characteristics and customs to these people. Traders such as the Phoenicians are invariably described as deeply dishonest; Easterners such as the Syrians, spoiled by luxury, are "natural" slaves. The zoolatry of the Egyptians unnerved the Greeks, as did the greater antiquity of their culture. Egyptians, in the Greek view, are typically wanton, dishonest, and rebellious; their religion is a depraved dementia. Jewish customs and religion also occasioned negative comment. The Jewish god, disliking the company of other gods, was accused, like his people, of "unsociability." Jewish food laws were obtuse; circumcision was at once repulsive, alarming, and vaguely comical. Greek writers presented such negative stereotypes and demeaning descriptions as flat fact. Various foreigners, they claimed, were simply dangerous: they sacrificed humans or ate them; they were sexually profligate; in war they

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were sickeningly savage; in peace, intrinsically untrustworthy.

THE GREEKS ASKED, "WHAT are these foreign peoples like?" and let prejudice shape the answer. But they also asked the more fundamental question: "Why are foreign peoples the way they are?" and grounded their hostile stereotyping in "scientific" explanations that accounted for the character of entire peoples. The physical and mental traits of ethnic groups, these Greeks held, were fixed in populations by environment. "Environment," as we have already seen in the case of Isocrates, was imagined in different ways: as society, as government, as climate, as geography (which connected "race" with "soil"), and (a particularly inflexible form of environmental determinism) as astrology.

Isaac observes that the concept of the environment as causing national characteristics rode together with a bipolar worldview wherein Europe, where the climate was harsh and the people were sturdy, contrasted with Asia, where the climate was good and the people were wealthy and, in consequence, "soft." Aristotle refined the idea further: the Greeks, he said, occupied the ideal environment between Europe and Asia. Greeks were therefore most suited to ruling others. Further, Aristotle explained, the inhabitants of Asia, servile by nature, were likewise well suited—again, by nature—to being ruled by Greeks. Alexander's victories, of course, "proved" the correctness of Aristotle's theorizing.

A further conviction strengthened this view. Not only were a people's characteristic (and characterological) traits acquired by environmental influence, but these characteristics, once acquired, were heritable, virtually intrinsic to their designated "race." Hence Phoenicians were typically Phoenician wherever they were, even when outside their native environment, whether natural or social. Jews were always and everywhere Jews; Egyptians, unalterably Egyptian. Their acquired characteristics ran in the blood, passing invariably from one generation to the next.

This idea had a convenient corollary. It justified imperial rule. Conquered peoples, as evinced by their defeat, were inferior to the victors by nature. And once enslaved, they acquired further servile characteristics from their servile condition and also passed these on to their descendants. Slaves, in this view, were born slaves and born to be slaves. But the obverse did not apply: freedom could not alter the nature of a slave. Once deteriorated, ethnic character stayed deteriorated, or could only further decline.

But contact with outsiders—an inevitable consequence of empire—brought with it also anxiety over contamination: the low qualities of outsiders, in the view of the Greeks, were contagious, communicable through contact. In an age of globalization and immigration, then, when people of various ethnic groups resettled in significant numbers, the vanquished posed real dangers in the imagination of the victors. Their low characteristics might pass via resident aliens into the "host" culture, and thereby corrupt it. (Again, the obverse never applied: aliens could not, by contact with Greeks, substantially improve.) So one source of the hostile stereotyping so visible in these ancient sources seems to be fear—a fear that, according to the canons of their own explanatory theories of Greek moral and cultural superiority and of corresponding foreign decrepitude, was not rational.

ROME INHERITED THIS GREEK worldview, with some necessary modifications. Rome's Western geographical location and its military success enabled (and perhaps required) thoughtful Romans to hoist the conquered Greeks by their own theorizing petard. The Greeks, many now slaves, became the soft, luxury-spoiled Easterners; the Romans became the "hard," virile, virtuous Westerners. And whereas Greeks had thought primarily in binary oppositions of East and West—Europe as opposed to Asia, Greece as opposed to Persia—the realities of Roman conquest turned the comparative axis ninety degrees. Romans thought in terms of North and South, and tinkered with theories of racial environmentalism accordingly. The too-cold North produced fierce fighters defective in government and culture (that is, the Germans); the too-warm South produced effeminate, servile, overly cultivated weaklings (the Egyptians, for example). Italy, needless to say, occupied the

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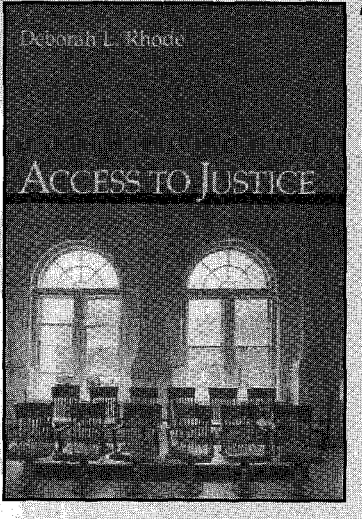

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perfect middle. It produced the world's natural rulers. "The true perfect territory," writes Vitruvius, a first-century B.C.E. author, "is that which is occupied by the Roman people. In fact, the races of Italy are the most perfectly constituted in both respects, in bodily form and in mental activity, to correspond to their valor.... Hence it was the Divine Intelligence that set the city of Rome in a peerless and temperate country, in order that it might ... command the whole world."

Roman imperialism was both like and unlike Hellenistic imperialism. Roman intellectuals adopted and adapted much of Greek ethnographic "science," expanding the theory to account for and describe the exotic others whom they now encountered on their northern and western frontiers: Celts, Gauls, Britons, various Germanic tribes. Insecure about their own culture (they were indebted, and they knew it, to the richer culture of the Greeks), they insisted on their own excellence in the virtues that they valued: virility, moral and physical discipline, patriotism.

Yet Romans also inherited the Greeks' fear of influence. Their anxieties were fanned by their own greater success. The Pax Romana, together with the superlative engineering of an empire-wide system of highways, required and enabled the army's greater mobility and encouraged increased interior migration. Romans worried about their armies' weakening through contact with the very outsiders whom they had defeated. And they worried particularly about the "purity" of Rome, with so many foreign residents polluting the capital and its citizens, alienating presiding Roman deities by dragging along their suspect customs and strange gods. From time to time, the Senate acted on these anxieties and issued directives temporarily driving such suspect foreigners (Egyptians, astrologers, Jews) out of Rome. This fear of alienating heaven ultimately led to the significant anomaly of persecution, the attempt to coerce other Romans to worship only the gods that were native to them.

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Yet Rome's political culture was much more open than that of the Greeks. Manumission was a normal and widespread practice, and the large freedman class of former slaves contributed vigorously to Roman society. Citizenship in Greek city-states had been closed, commonly restricted to offspring whose parents were both citizens. Rome granted citizenship generously: by 212 C.E., it had universally enfranchised the free population of the empire. Coping with their own success, imperial Romans fretted about the dangers of foreign influence; the moral hazards of immigration; the communicable corruptions of intrinsically inferior outsiders passing, whether through the army or through pliant civilians, into their own culture, compromising their much-loved *Romanitas*. They articulated these fears and prejudices by drawing deeply on the xenophobic legacy of Greek proto-racist theorizing. And yet they produced one of the most open and international societies that the West has known.

CLASSICISTS AND ANCIENT historians have long debated among themselves whether Greek and Roman societies were "racist." They have concluded that these societies were unquestionably given to xenophobia. Ethnic and cultural prejudice doubtless existed. But Greeks and Romans, in academic estimation, were innocent of a concept that could reasonably be identified as "racism."

Benjamin Isaac now seems to have settled this question against the previous consensus. He has done so by scrupulously canvassing some eight centuries' worth of ancient evidence, and by analyzing a huge swath of academic opinion in at least a half-dozen modern languages. But in his quest to define his historical question with precision, Isaac has also surveyed and evaluated the various definitions of racism proffered by the modern fields of sociology, anthropology, psychoanalysis, Darwin studies, law, and biological science. With compelling intellectual and moral lucidity, he considers the phenomenon of racism itself: the ways that it rests on "science," the ways that it posits the heritability of acquired characteristics, the ways that it reduces the individual to the definitions of an imagined collective.

These are the points of principle common to both ancient and modern racist theory. True, modern racism relies upon applications (and distortions) of Darwin in ways that ancient racism could not, but this distinction should not obscure their more fundamental similarities. Biological determinism characterizes modern racism and grounds it in "science" in precisely the same way that environmental determinism characterizes and grounds the racist theories of antiquity. In subordinating the individual to the collective ("race"), ancient racism and modern racism both ignore the ways in which individuality, personal characteristics, and free will shape human experience and, thus, humanity.

Herein lies the telling distinction between ethnic prejudice and racism. Contemporary anti-immigration movements, for example, often demand that immigrant minorities conform to the cultural and social values of the host country. Ethnic prejudice thus does not deny the possibility of change, whether at the individual or the collective level. Racism does. But "race" in the sense that racists employ the concept—a population invariably displaying intrinsic and unchanging social, cultural, psychological, and physical characteristics—does not exist. As Isaac urges, quoting the Belgian social scientist Jean Hiernaux, "Race is not a fact, but a concept."

This concept of race from the classical past was preserved in literature widely read by European intellectuals ever since the Renaissance. "If it is accepted that the Athenians inspired Western civilization with their democracy," Isaac asks, "can it be denied that they were instrumental in conveying the idea of racism?" Enlightenment figures thought deeply with antiquity's racist theories, to which they added their own preoccupation with skin color. Thus Buffon theorized that black men (that is, Africans) were a degenerate form of white men, grown progressively darker through prolonged exposure to extremes of heat and sun. He further opined that countries lying in a temperate zone—in Europe, say—produced the most beautiful people. Hume asserted that "Negroes, and in general all other species of men ... are naturally inferior to whites." Voltaire repudiated the idea that climate caused skin color as unscientific: "Negro men and Negro women, transported to the coldest countries," he observed, "still produce there animals [*sic*] of their own species." He concluded that blacks must have sprung from different original ancestors.

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The great Kant coordinated all these different observations by combining the theory of climate-caused skin color with the idea of inherited characteristics: once heat had caused skin to blacken and the condition was communicated across generations, it was irreversible, fixed "by nature." Climate also affected temperament and intelligence, Kant held, which is why blacks were by nature also intellectually deficient. ("So fundamental is the difference between these two races of man, that it appears to be as great in regard to mental capacities as in color.") And unlike the more generous Buffon, who was willing to regard all natives of temperate climes as most beautiful, Kant's aesthetics demanded more precision: "The tallest and most beautiful people on dry land are on the parallel and the degrees which run through Germany."

With dry humor and a keen eye, Isaac traces this march of folly through the racist theorists of the nineteenth century to the fantasies of eugenics, through modern anti-discrimination laws that seek to protect groups of people from race crimes by defining them as racial groups to the highways and byways of UNESCO documents, through the Library of Congress's horrifically muddled cataloguing protocols to the 1996 Michelin Guides to Venice ("The Venetian is born with a positive attitude toward life that is maintained by an imperturbable nature") and to Scandinavia (where it seems that native Scandinavians are born with national pride). The patterns of racist thought pop up everywhere, even when the enterprise at hand is self-consciously anti-racist. Isaac's wit lightens a very oppressive realization: our culture seems powerfully drawn to thinking in these racist terms.

That this is so, as Isaac has powerfully argued, is testimony to the foundational importance and powerful intellectual legacy of Greece and Rome. Ancient Greeks and Romans have bequeathed us not only their ideas of freedom, art, philosophy, and much else that we value, but also, he concludes, "some of the elementary concepts of discrimination and inequality that are still with us." To be able to identify these sinister concepts clearly is to give us some critical purchase on them, and thus some crucial distance from them. In this hope, and for this reason, anyone concerned with racism, and more generally with the moral complexity of our civilization, will be profoundly educated by Isaac's magisterial and ethically lucid study. ■

David Thomson's new book, THE WHOLE EQUATION: A HISTORY OF HOLLYWOOD, *has just been published by Knopf.*

David Thomson
The Observer as Hero

ISHERWOOD: A LIFE REVEALED
By Peter Parker
(Random House, 815 pp., $39.95)

"FIX" IS A WORD FOR OUR time, blunt and secretive, yet promising transformation. If the "fix" is in, don't we all suffer because of it? When the World Series of 1919 was "fixed," the game needed Babe Ruth in order to recover. But if we have a bad knee or a car that won't start, it is a mercy if someone says they can "fix" it for us. That treatment—we hope—doesn't involve a cheating fix. It must be a true case of repair or restoration. But there is another way of "fixing" things, and it goes like this:

> I am a camera with its shutter open, quite passive, recording, not thinking. Recording the man shaving at the window opposite and the woman in the kimono washing her hair. Some day, all this will have to be developed, carefully printed, fixed.

Those first four words are as famous as they are tendentious (a camera doesn't know a kimono from a kiss). They are Christopher Isherwood in Berlin in the years from 1929 to 1933, between demoralization and Nazification, boys for sale and the Hitler Youth. That moment is still so modern, so dangerous, and so demanding of individual decision that it makes Hemingway in Paris only a few years earlier seem like the last season of the Grand Tour where Europe sat still to have its picture taken.

"Fixed" was, for Isherwood, a new usage: it is the photo-chemical process used to stabilize an image in the darkroom. That could make you think that "fixing" is somehow geared to correctness, or finding the one and only right print—as in, "Well, I've fixed your papers, Mr. Lime." But, as any photographer knows, the fix is optional, and creative in its degree and its timing. The fix locks a picture in, but only at the photo-emotional level that the photographer wants. The fix is atmosphere: the day can be bright or noir. It is your choice.

Here is an example of how Isherwood's fix could be ambiguous. When he came back from Berlin in 1933, he had the notion of turning his diaries and his memories into a "huge tightly constructed melodramatic novel in the manner of Balzac." He wanted to find room for all the wayward, doomed, stray, and shadowy people he met in Berlin, and he thought of calling the novel *Die Verlorenen*, or *The Lost*. But he changed his mind (and the title remained available for the somber little-known movie that Peter Lorre directed in the 1950s). Yet Isherwood's people—Sally Bowles, Mr. Norris, the boys, and even Herr Issyvoo—why, they are not lost, they are indelibly inscribed (I nearly said fixed) in our view of Berlin on the brink of Hitler. It's a lurch or two, I admit, from Jean Ross (the original and unsuccessful Sally) to Julie Harris in *I Am a Camera* (1955) or Liza Minnelli in *Cabaret* (1972). Christopher Isherwood is now forever linked to the insouciance of "Life is a cabaret, old chum." But if Sally Bowles had been that good, he once remarked, she would have been a star.

IF SALLY BOWLES'S BERLIN IS THE modern, swift-bite take on Isherwood, then the fixing day has come with Peter Parker's immense and magnificent biography. Some of Isherwood's admirers will be put off by its title. After all, Isherwood has hardly suffered from neglect, and a great part of his often tricky mix of art and self-promotion was to make his life the essential material for his casually narcissistic project. Well in advance of Norman Mailer and *Advertisements for Myself*, he was in the habit of keeping

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detailed journals that would then be reworked in the striking innovations of personal re-invention or autobiographical fiction that are *Mr. Norris Changes Trains* and *Goodbye to Berlin*, published together as the work we call *The Berlin Stories* and regard as a canonical evocation of Hitlerism. Yes, Herr Issyvoo feared and hated Hitler, and guessed what was coming earlier than most (he loved dread). But he was also sufficiently hooked on appearance and allure to train the cowlick in his own hairstyle to imitate the Führer's.

Still, "A Life Revealed" is a modest subtitle for such a daunting process of reconstruction and re-appraisal. Parker's book is well over four hundred thousand words, while its subject's own work was known for brevity, chat, and snapshot spontaneity. It might easily have been two books, *England Made Me* and *Becoming an American*; and it is obviously a labor of great devotion and dedication. Parker gives great thanks to the no-strings trust and the quantity of papers offered by Don Bachardy, Isherwood's near-spouse in the Californian years and his executor. At the same time he admits that while Bachardy made no intervention in the work, "he felt unable to give the book his endorsement when he finally read it." What Bachardy may have found hard to bear is the mounting realization on the part of Parker that Isherwood was a user, a poseur, and the kind of fellow who might have been identified in his own books as a bit of a shit. The most nagging question presented by this great biography is whether this life really matters.

I do not mean to suggest that Parker is disapproving. Indeed, one of the steadfast things about this book is its author's determination to test Isherwood on his own terms. In consequence, hardly anyone gives more damning testimony against Isherwood than Isherwood himself. The indiscretions and the false steps are as human as the fun. If you are a fan, this cannot come as a great surprise, since you will have already struggled with the weird way in the published *Diaries* that Isherwood can talk about "Christopher" as if he were a movie playing on a nearby screen. Long before the end of this long book, the riddle about Isherwood is not just whether he believed that he was a camera, but how closely he could regard his own life as a picture, a movie, one that he had certainly fixed (he was the lead character, the star, and the director, plus the most earnest audience), but for which he had no clinching responsibility.

So how does Isherwood write? Reviewing *Goodbye to Berlin* in 1939 in The New Republic, Edmund Wilson thought that the Englishman was "already, on a small scale, a master." According to Wilson, Isherwood's prose "has the 'transparency' which the Russians praise in Pushkin. The sentences all get you somewhere almost without your noticing that you are reading them; the similes always have a point without ever obtruding themselves before the object. You seem to look right through Isherwood and see what he sees." There it is again, that feeling of being caught in the act of seeing something naked or forbidden, in a mixture of voyeur's guilt and photojournalistic thrill.

Parker is always alert to cameras in Isherwood's life, and he regularly notes the films that Christopher was seeing. Apart from reading and writing, boys and movies filled Isherwood's life, especially in the 1930s. One thing that Parker omits is just how far Isherwood was spurred on by pictures, or by forms of literature that borrowed from photography. It is fascinating to learn that Isherwood had read, and even identified with, Musil's *The Man Without Qualities*, but I wonder also how well he knew Dos Passos's *USA*, with its mixture of line-drawing narrative illustrations, newsreels, and "Camera Eye" sections.

Was Isherwood a true window on Berlin, or a moviegoer haunted by the life on screen and by his own impotence in stopping or intervening in its cruelties? I put it this way because a key to Isherwood's witnessing of Berlin is his excited powerlessness. This could reflect the wistful leftist's fear of the lights going out all over the world again, or the moviegoer's sublime surrender to the automatic fluency of film. Consider this, from "The Nowaks," part of *Goodbye to Berlin*, and surely the stuff that impressed Wilson:

> The entrance to the Wassertorstrasse was a big stone archway, a bit of old Berlin, daubed with hammers and sickles and Nazi crosses and plastered with tattered bills which advertised auctions or crimes. It was a deep shabby cobbled street, littered with sprawling children in tears. Youths in woolen sweaters circled waveringly across it on racing bikes and whooped at girls passing with milk-jugs. The pavement was chalk-marked for the hopping game called Heaven and Earth. At the end of it, like a tall, dangerously sharp, red instrument, stood a church.

As a first paragraph, could a narrative hook bite deeper? As reportage, or journalism, could it be more vivid? As prose, it refuses to yield to style for its own sake. The terse directness of the description prepares us for the colloquial body of most of Isherwood's writing—the reliance on dialogue, the wicked ear for special pleading (or giving away the inner self) that is the secret to movie talk. But is the writer really a camera? I don't think so. Such prose reaches way beyond the camera's ability to see that the tattered bills advertise auctions or crimes. Indeed, the longer you reflect on that passing remark, the more clearly it becomes creative and mysterious—the more dramatically it indicates a whole economic and moral order, a diagnosis of a society.

But this hint is only a prelude to the startling depiction of the church standing there, as sharp as Gothic and as red as a wound. And there is something else, I think: the red is like blood, hand-colored on top of a black-and-white picture. I don't know if Berlin in the early 1930s really looked like that, but it is what the world looks or feels like in *M* and *Pandora's Box*. This is not to say that Isherwood didn't use his eyes every day in wandering the shabby parts of Berlin, but I suspect that his creative impulse was often prompted by movies—more specifically, by the expressionist camera's capacity for presenting a world that seems factual and exact but which is always a dream of death and decay. Just as there is no daylight in Lang's austere films, so the light in Isherwood is seldom natural but rather theatrical. It is the baleful glow of the screen itself, and the city is not so much an authentic place as a stage set meant for the end of the world. Isherwood felt that his England was shattered after 1918, but at least it looked free from battles or occupation. Berlin, by contrast, was a blasted and demoralized place, a bare cavern, where different ideologies could be wheeled in and out like sets. That is the key to the German movies of that era, the way the world had become a haunted studio.

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THERE WAS, TO BE SURE, A preening and sometimes cruel narcissist in this writer who had no ambition beyond the clarification and the celebration of his self. This is not always the most likable trait, no matter how hard it seems to be striving for lucidity or freedom. Several of his closest associates could not fail to notice this, even as they admired Isherwood as the natural leader of their group. Auden noted that Isherwood "held no opinions whatever about anything. He was wholly and simply interested in people. He did not like or dislike them, judge them favorably or unfavorably. He simply regarded them as material for his Work."

It is a measure of the searching but tolerant intelligence of Parker's approach that he gradually draws the reader into wondering how far that pose of neutrality was an aggressive mannerism, and one that fit with the homosexual life that Isherwood did so much to open up. Christopher devoured boys, but in his diaries he was quite prepared to admit how rarely individuals actually moved him in any way that could compare with the impression left by his own feelings. He was naturally promiscuous, in the way that the camera is ready to snap, or to adore, anyone.

You read Parker's book marveling at Isherwood's readiness to go to bed with so many, and feeling the increasing chill of an egotism that never quite falls in love with anyone but hangs on the idea of a thwarted love. The nexus of Isherwood's emotional life in the 1930s was the discovery of Heinz, a rough German kid, and the frantic attempts to keep Heinz away from Germany, where he risked imprisonment or worse, and the eventual masochistic sublimity as Heinz was indeed incarcerated and put out of bounds forever—or until 1952, by which time Heinz was married and Christopher had fresh legions of boys in sunny California.

The young Christopher took justified pride in his very striking looks. Auden wrote about "your squat spruce body and enormous head," but Isherwood kept a rather more flattering (or literary) mirror in use: "I only seem young [he was thirty-four] because my face is lean and usually animated, and because I have very bright large grey-green eyes, and regular, if nicotine-stained teeth.... The most I can hope for is to be described as 'interesting.' The majority of people would probably say that my face had a lot of 'character.'" Well, yes, in the way of actors' faces. I don't think it's beside the point that over the years Isherwood and Bachardy (and David Hockney) established a look, or a gaze, for the artistic gay man—direct, candid, unashamedly pretty, the cowlick shifting into the "faux brutal" crew cut, the whole attitude, as Auden put it, "spruce": looking one's best, and bringing the best bright regard to the world. It can also give you the creeps sometimes, in just the way that talking seriously with actors can be a very depleting experience. They do it professionally, you see.

I understand that such observations come close to "prejudice," and I grant that we are not supposed to be so impressed by the way we look. But after reading Parker's book, I suspect that Isherwood worked as hard at his look as he did with his prose. And it leaves a problem, or a black hole, behind the very "open" gaze, a worry that helps one be suspicious of all that facile chatter about being a camera. Cameras eat up experience, but they also flatten it. And the moving images on the screen whisper: just watch, don't get too involved. Cameras are libertines not bothered with issues of fidelity or betrayal. In this sense, the camera quietly abets Isherwood's romantic strategy: he "preferred to have two or three affairs running concurrently; in that way, he felt less involved with any particular individual." That is what nagged at so many people who knew Isherwood, the way he consumed people without digesting them, because he had this theory of being so impersonal or objective:

> There is only one protection, one hope for me. Let me strive and struggle for a certain calm, a certain balance. Let me have courage. Never, never admit one's weakness to one's dearest friend. The only happiness, or indeed sanity, is in a core of detachment. A vital proud core of utter utter indifference, so that one goes one's way. In all humility, but alone.

And here is the same mood but more literary, Isherwood finding himself in a passage in Musil:

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For the more I think about myself, the more persuaded I am that, as a person, I really don't exist. That is one of the reasons why—much as I'm tempted to try—I can't believe in any orthodox religion: I cannot believe in my own soul. No, I am a chemical compound, conditioned by environment and education. My "character" is simply a repertoire of acquired tricks, my conversation is a repertoire of adaptations and echoes, my "feelings" are dictated by purely physical, external stimuli.... Very few people trust me, I think—and how right they are.

Parker has ample evidence of that. In 1938, the editor and publisher John Lehmann described Isherwood "sitting with his schemer's gleam on his face, watching for signs of pleasant treachery in a flabby world." At much the same time Stephen Spender, an acolyte often scolded by Isherwood and depicted as a bit of an idiot, made this piercing observation about his autobiographical book *Lions and Shadows*: "The self-portrait could scarcely ... be more evasive. By sneering at the more self-pitying & even tragic aspects of yourself, you are really showing a typically English brand of dishonesty, which consists in admitting the real and then making it seem unimportant by the exercise of a sense of humor.... You are far more interesting, and rather more sinister in some ways, than you make out."

THE "TYPICALLY ENGLISH" IS at the heart of the matter. Christopher Isherwood was born on August 26, 1904 on the Cheshire estate of his grandfather. The future exile and resolute outcast was of the landed gentry class, and related to the Greene family, a sort of cousin to Graham Greene. The two men were far from close, though one of the few angles neglected by Parker is a comparison of the two writers, both hooked on movies, whose vivid writing grew out of a horror of so many things English.

Christopher's father, Frank, a lieutenant colonel, was killed (and his body never found) at Ypres when Christopher was only nine. That left the boy and his younger brother Richard to their mother, Kathleen. There is no better way of describing Parker's method than to outline his clear record of the ways in which Christopher wearied of his mother and her settled bourgeois character, and used her to some extent as the trigger to his homosexuality or the wall off which it was ready to bounce. But then, subtly, as the story proceeds, Parker lets another truth emerge: that the used and abused mother was decent and loving, albeit often helpless in the drab role of "Mother," but patient, loyal, and nearly always the source of extra monies whenever Christopher got into a scrape. That means monies above and beyond the regular allowance from his uncle Henry. Parker has made splendid use of the mother's diaries (she was like her son in pouring out her dilemmas in private pages), so we cannot overlook Kathleen being treated badly by a man whose credo was to see people for what they were, no more and no less. She learned to abide by her son's gay life and often to subsidize it, and she had another son to look after, who was neurotically disabled and maybe an undiagnosed schizophrenic.

And let us not forget Nanny. When Christopher made one of his crucial liberating trips to Germany, to get away from mother and motherland, Nanny packed his suitcase for him. Nanny was engaged in Isherwood's infancy but kept on until he was past thirty. Sometimes the way in which this support system is referred to, but hardly noticed, is breathtaking. A time came in Christopher's desperate attempt to keep Heinz for himself when they were living in Estoril, outside Lisbon. The German consulate found them, and delivered Heinz's call-up papers. A lawyer could find no way out, whereupon Isherwood lamented, "Everything seemed to be slipping away down into a bottomless black drain. It is an awful moment when the absolute confidence of childhood—'Nanny'd never let that happen to me'—is shaken."

PARKER NEVER EXACTLY JUDGES Isherwood; it's just that, with original diaries by the mother and the son, as well as the son's later "literary" version, he is too scrupulous to let the discrepancies slip away. The book reveals the rather brisk way in which Isherwood often sought to "fix" or to correct his life in rewrite.

And yet Parker never lets us lose sight of the vivacity in Isherwood's writing, or the compelling hysteria of his self-dramatization. And so we get a clear sense of Auden and Isherwood as collaborating playwrights (*The Dog Beneath the Skin*, 1935; *The Ascent of F6*, 1936; *On the Frontier*, 1938), and of Isherwood beginning to work as a movie scenarist, with the exiled director Berthold Viertel. The man who saw himself as an act was fascinated by stage and movie effects. What a movie it could make even now, Auden and Isherwood, schoolmates in their teens, lovers and wounding friends throughout the 1930s, playwrights in harness, and voices sneering at the England that dozed as fascist dreams built. They often lived and traveled together, not

The Bad Teacher

She could come to the door in September for our son. All

thistled cursive and miscounted nickels. She
might tell him facts he'll recall all his life:

Mice are spontaneously
generated by garbage.
The size of the skull is the size of the mind.
At the end of all this love
and fuss, we die. *Everything*
your mother told you about eternity was a lie.

I imagine her at night at a desk made for a child.
Her knees too high. Her elbows
rest on the floor. Switched

off for summer. An awful
doll. *(I should have burned her as a girl, this has gone too far.)*
Her spine has been sewn
closed by the same
seamstress who sewed this:

a black felt scrap of nightmare, its
edges stitched up sloppily to the stars.

LAURA KASISCHKE

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just in Europe, but in China, and then fatefully in 1939, before war had started, to America itself. They shared a lot. When Erika Mann, Thomas Mann's daughter, needed to get out of Germany, she asked Isherwood if he would marry her to secure English papers. Christopher thought not. Mummy wouldn't understand—even if he usually exulted in doing what Mummy didn't grasp. So he suggested she ask Auden, and he married her. The poet and the novelist often sent joint cables together to friends, signed "Wystopher"—it's like something out of A. A. Milne.

"ENGLAND MADE ME" IS THE first half of Parker's book—it covers thirty-five years in 359 pages, and leaves you feeling you have lived through every hectic, exhilarating moment, even if there is a residue of shame that Isherwood keeps escaping. Of course, "escape" was the ultimate insult thrown at his removal to California as war took over Europe. As you may imagine, Isherwood fretted over whether he felt guilty or just numb. Remarkably, Parker shows how, once "away" from his old world, much of the political apparatus of the 1930s slid off, like winter clothes in Santa Monica, and never came out of storage.

Did Isherwood become American? In so many ways, Isherwood in America relaxed, or slept—the promiscuity he could enjoy was now unlimited, though many readers may find it as boring and inconsequential as the movie work he did at several studios around town. He never really got his name on a good movie. If only he had teamed up with Hitchcock; they were both appalled by possessive mothers. Norman Bates is the kind of American Isherwood should have written about. Nor is Parker quite able to muster the necessary enthusiasm for Isherwood the Vedantan. Christopher at peace is such a boring fellow: he was most himself when edgy, guilty, and maneuvering. He could do the suntan of mysticism, but the swami soul is waiting for his mockery. Auden thought the Vedantism was mumbo-jumbo. The aged Somerset Maugham told Christopher that he'd sold out for happiness.

In 1945 he published *Prater Violet*, which contains brilliant analyses of the comedy and fraud in moviemaking. Then there were more conventional novels—the curiously inert *The World in the Evening* (1954), and maybe his best book of all, *A Single Man* (1964), in which there is a taut, unsentimental tone about what happens when spruceness turns autumnal. But as he ran out of new experiences, Isherwood faced the problem of inventing characters. This he did not really know how to do. He needed someone from life to take off on.

NOT EVEN A LONG REVIEW CAN properly convey the pleasures of this book. Parker writes very well, with a dry humor that brings Isherwood's balloon to earth. Does the book deserve its length? I'm sure Parker knows how much longer it might have been. I kept promising myself that I would do some judicious skimming here and there, but I could not: Parker is too skillful for that, too faithful to the material, and to the gossipy appeal of Isherwood. The detail is immense, but I forgive it all for discoveries such as this one: that Gotz von Eick, a tall blond Jewish musician with whom Jean Ross had an affair in the early 1930s, turned into Peter van Eyck (1913–1969), an unforgettably pouty, baby-faced heavy in films such as *Mr. Arkadin*, *The Desert Fox*, and *The Wages of Fear*.

To look at van Eyck (imagine Peter Lorre on steroids) was to know that he had a history he was trying to forget. And acting was the modern way of doing oblivion. That's how Harry Lime in *The Third Man* manages to preside over the ravaged Vienna by playing himself after death. I think that this is the answer, really—for Isherwood and his gang survived remarkable and dodgy times when Berlin was not a moveable feast but a stain of bankruptcy that threatened the world. For decades we were all guilty over that Berlin. It was a moment when gayness was first liberated amid greater threats than it has faced since. But it was also a time when moral fiction-writing had hardly begun to face the question of whether choice or loyalty means anything when you can have everyone.

Isherwood was not a camera. No one is or ever will be. But he was one of the first to feel the temptation, and to realize that the idea was so heady it appealed to liberals and fascists alike. "I was born a film fan," he once remarked.

> The cinema puts people under a microscope: you can stare at them, you can examine them as though they were insects. True, the behavior you see on the screen isn't natural behavior; it is acting, and often very bad acting, too. But the acting has always a certain relation to ordinary life; and, after a short while, to an *habitué* like myself, it is as little of an annoyance as Elizabethan handwriting is to the expert in old documents. Viewed from this standpoint, the stupidest film may be full of astonishing revelations about the tempo and dynamics of everyday life; you see how actions look in relation to each other; how much space they occupy and how much time.

There it is, the special way in which Christopher Isherwood learned to write about the moment, and had a decade of his life so crammed and so tense with tempo it's no wonder that he was tired or frustrated afterward. The Californian Isherwood, after all, was someone resting up from the intense dread and thrill of a movie about days and nights in Berlin. ■

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WASHINGTON DIARIST

God Again

"THANK YOU, MOSES." When I heard those words outside the marshal's office at the Supreme Court the other day, I trembled for my country. I had come to hear the oral arguments in the Ten Commandments cases, and was prepared for a morning's appreciation of what Moses brought down from the mountain; but in the courtroom, not in the corridor. My liberal's back went up. Thou shalt not mistake the Torah for the Constitution. But my liberal's sigh of relief could be heard up and down the marble hall when I discovered that the revered figure who was the object of this grateful address was a jolly guard named Moses. He had just steered a gaggle of God-fearers in the direction of the great chamber. Moses had led them to the struggle for Moses. I followed behind, no mean Mosaicist myself.

IT WAS AMUSING TO WATCH THE CONSERvatives at the lectern argue that the monument of the Ten Commandments on the grounds of the state capitol in Austin deserves the protection of the Court because it is the historical, and even the secular, symbol of a common heritage; and encouraging to discover that the justices were having none of this Christian casuistry. They seemed all to agree that the Decalogue is a religious expression, which plainly it is. None of them seemed especially horrified by this fact, at least in these settings. A reasonable distinction between the acknowledgment of religion by the state and the establishment of religion by the state was in the air, and none of the justices wished government to be hostile to religion. I will be surprised if the Court orders the slab of pious stone in Texas, or the framed commandments that hang in courthouses in Kentucky, removed.

STILL, TROUBLING THINGS WERE SAID. A number of the justices declared—dispositively, as they like to say—that "we are a religious nation." The implication was that there is a quantitative answer to a philosophical question. But what does the prevalence of a belief have to do with its veracity, or with its legitimacy? If every American but one were religious, we would still have to construct our moral and political order upon respect for that one. In its form, the proposition that "we are a religious nation" is like the proposition that "we are a white nation" or that "we are a Christian nation" or that "we are a heterosexual nation," which is to say, it is a prescription for the tyranny of a majority. And if the opposite generalization were the case, if we were not "a religious nation," if we were a multitude of heretics and voluptuaries, would the case for tolerating a public display of the Mosaic creed be less powerful? The joke here is on the believers. They hold their faith not because it is popular, but because it is true. If they resort to the argument from numbers, however, they will rob their beliefs of philosophical prestige, and abandon them to the netherworld of popular nonsense. There is strength in numbers, but there is not truth. In this regard, the moral sensibilities of minorities are more refined than the moral sensibilities of majorities. They are never flattered by empiricism, never tempted by triumphalism.

THE MORNING'S DISPUTATIONS CONfirmed me in my view of Antonin Scalia's lack of intellectual distinction. He is very smart, of course; but now he shows only the brilliance of a perfectly settled perspective. I have been an amateur but diligent reader of his opinions for many years, and increasingly they seem like opeds in robes. Scalia does not recognize the difference between a denunciation and a demonstration. At the court last week, he dripped certainties. "Government draws its authority from God." "Our laws are derived from God." "The moral order is ordained by God." "Human affairs are directed by God." "God is the foundation of the state." These are dogmas, not proofs. Scalia simply asserts them and moves on to incredulity and indignation. But how does he know these things? Does he hold these opinions, all venerable ones, by the authority of his reason or by the authority of his tradition? If by the former, then he should do my reason the honor of giving an account of his reason, so that I might be able in good conscience to assent; and if by the latter, well, his tradition is not my tradition, and so his assurances do not compel me. Certainty, as Maimonides warned his student, must not come by accident. It is an insult to democratic discussion to introduce these doctrines without an accompanying sense of the obligation to argue for them. But Scalia dispenses with argument, he lives after argument; and in its happy sensation of its own rightness, life after argument is very much like life before argument. Scalia's undisturbed experience of obvious truth is a kind of mental decadence. And his condescension can become cynicism, as when he insouciantly declared that "probably 90 percent of the American people believe in the Ten Commandments and I bet you 85 percent couldn't tell you what they are." It doesn't matter that 85 percent of the American people are taking His name in vain, as long as they are taking it.

AS AN ILLUSTRATION OF AN ACCEPTable display of the Ten Commandments on government property, some of the justices pointed to the figure of Moses on the marble frieze on the upper wall of their own courtroom, carved after pencil sketches by Cass Gilbert, the building's Beaux-Arts architect. (Moses appears also on the eastern pediment outside the building.) There the prophet stands, facing the bench, and holding in his hands the revealed law, inscribed in Hebrew and in gold. By a miracle of political convenience, only the second tablet appears, the one with the non-theological instructions. As I pondered this sculpture, I saw that it represents not a victory for the believers, but a defeat for them. For here is the son of Amram, fresh from his meeting with God at Sinai, newly in possession of the exclusive and immutable law, alongside Hammurabi and Menes and Solon and Confucius and Octavian. (And opposite Mohammed and Napoleon and John Marshall.) He is a lawgiver among lawgivers, no more. This is a fine iconographical program for the court, but it is decidedly not what the devout have in mind. On the south wall of America's most significant courtroom, the Ten Commandments have not only been celebrated, they have also been relativized. I reflected sweetly upon the inevitability with which the multiplicity of beliefs in an open society condemns absolutists to an exasperated existence. Pluralism protects them, but it also discomfits them. And their discomfiture is one of democracy's beauties.

LEON WIESELTIER

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Hot Button Issues

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The Burden of Law

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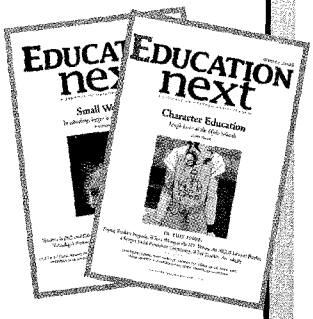

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Not long ago, I visited an inner-city Catholic high school. I was impressed with what I saw. The halls were quiet, the students respected their teachers, and the principal was the ultimate authority on issues regarding students and teachers.

I had a nagging suspicion that I had seen a school very much like this long ago. Then I remembered: I was seeing a reflection of the public high school in Houston, Texas, that I had attended a half century ago.

What had happened during the past five decades? A recent report by a nonpartisan legal reform group called Common Good gives the answer: **schools today are being strangled by a ton of laws, regulations, contracts, mandates, and rules.** The report (which can be found at http://cgood.org/burden-of-law.html) analyzes the many steps that principals in New York City must take if, for example, they want to suspend a disruptive student who is making it impossible for other students to learn or repair the heating system or remove an inept teacher.

In every situation, the principal must take care not to violate federal laws, state laws, court decisions, consent decrees, case law, union contracts, and chancellor's regulations. Common Good's Web site has links to fifty different legal authorities that limit or control what the principal can and cannot do.

All these sources are more than any one individual can possibly read or comprehend: 850 pages of state law (in small print); 720 pages of state regulations; 15,000 formal decisions by the state commissioner of education; hundreds of pages of collective bargaining agreements; thousands of pages of federal laws affecting the schools; and thousands of pages of chancellor's regulations.

The principal who determines that a student is disrupting the learning environment or is a danger to himself or others must embark on a very lengthy legal process that involves multiple letters, notifications, conferences, hearings, appeals, decisions at the local level, more conferences, more hearings, more appeals, decisions at the regional level, more hearings, more appeals, and so on. It may take several weeks to resolve the matter.

Philip Howard, the chairman of Common Good and a lawyer, has been leading a campaign against the procedural burden imposed by law on our institutions. Howard insists that we should make educating our children our top priority, not complying with a mountain of laws, mandates, and regulations. According to Howard, **"We should let the administrators and teachers use their judgment and then hold them accountable for their performance."**

Common Good has not placed a price tag on the cost of compliance, but it is bound to be huge in terms of inefficiency, wasted time, resources diverted, and the inability of the schools to focus relentlessly on education.

Is it possible to free the schools from the smothering embrace of their friends who write the rules, laws, regulations, and mandates? If we do not figure out how to restore authority to teachers and principals, then our schools will continue to become ever more expensive and ever less effective.

—Diane Ravitch

Diane Ravitch is a research professor, New York University; distinguished visiting fellow, Hoover Institution; member, Hoover's Koret Task Force on K–12 Education; and adviser to Common Good.

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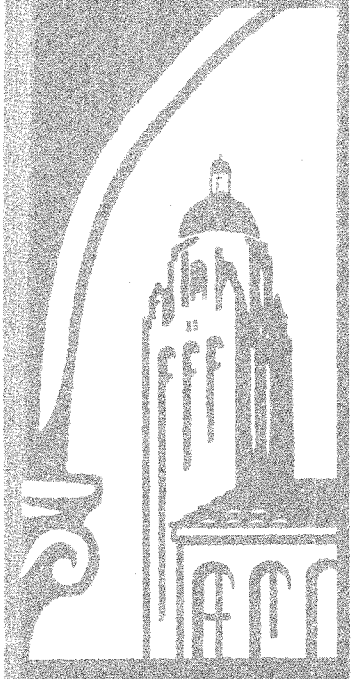

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